

THE  
KATYN WOOD  
MURDERS

by  
Joseph Mackiewicz

*With a Foreword by*  
ARTHUR BLISS LANE  
(Former U.S. Ambassador to Poland)

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TO  
Mrs. A. POKLEWSKA-KOZIEŁŁ WIŃCZA

and

JOSEPH GODLEWSKI  
(Senator of the Polish Republic)

who have encouraged and helped me  
in bringing to light the tragic truth  
described in these pages

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## FOREWORD

By ARTHUR BLISS LANE

Former U.S. Ambassador to Poland

THE Katyn massacre of over four thousand Polish Army officers was one of the most horrible crimes of World War II, equalling the barbarity of Hitler's wholesale extermination of members of the Jewish race in the gas chambers of Oswiecim and Majdanek. For reasons of war censorship many facts regarding the crime were concealed from the public at the time. Unfortunately, it must now be admitted, the fear of Soviet displeasure prevented the United States and British Governments from assuming a stronger stand in protecting the interests of their other ally—Poland. Mr. Mackiewicz, in the pages which follow, has revealed the story with a clarity based on intimate knowledge of the diplomatic, military and medical facts which add up to a terrible indictment of the criminal responsible: the Soviet State.

The reader may well ask himself why the 4,000-odd men found in Katyn, and the 11,000 other Polish officers who disappeared in the Soviet Union, were liquidated. As in the case of the refusal of the Soviet Army to assist the Polish insurrection in Warsaw in August and September, 1944 (after the Soviet Government had incited the Poles to revolt against the Nazis who were then occupying Warsaw), the Russian Communists wished to destroy all Polish nationalist and non-Communist elements. This seems to me to be the lesson of this brilliantly written book.

There is a moral, however, which transcends the question of Poland. It is world-wide. Since the Katyn massacre we have seen nationalism stamped out in Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Rumania and Yugoslavia. In Poland itself, the last vestiges of freedom were destroyed when the fraudulent elections were held on January 19th, 1947. British and American readers should therefore seriously ponder the import of the Soviet policy which is aimed at the destruction of democratic institutions and of all those who oppose the Communist doctrine of world domination.



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# I

## THE TREACHEROUS ASSAULT OF THE SOVIET UNION

ON the 1st of September, 1939, Hitler started the Second World War with a concentrated attack of his armies upon Poland. Two weeks later, Poland was still fighting, trying to stand alone against the entire German war machine whose strength and power had not yet been accurately estimated. Behind the Maginot Line, the Western Allies contented themselves for the time being by issuing a formal Declaration of War, and by dropping leaflets from the air over Germany. Later experience proved that Poland never had a chance successfully to resist the drive of the German Armies. And yet she still opposed them although her strength was ebbing.

It was the night of the 16th-17th of September. Moscow, although one of the greatest capitals of Europe, has no night life like other great cities, no gaiety. Moscow slept. But it had learned to sleep in a strange uneasy way since the Bolsheviks came to power. Even in the depths of slumber, ears would strain to catch the faintest sound of movement—of footsteps on the staircase of security agents who usually came by night. As usual, in the NKVD offices and the many prisons, uncovered lights shone. Everywhere else darkness reigned. There was, however, one exception on that particular night. Unusual activity could be observed in the rooms and offices of the NKID (People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs). But this was not known to the Polish Ambassador, Mr. Grzybowski, as he sat, bent over his radio set, trying to get the latest

news from the battle-fronts in Poland, before he retired for the night. Suddenly the telephone rang piercingly in the silence.

"Hello?"

"The People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs requires the presence of your Excellency at 3 a.m."

Mr. Grzybowski looked at his watch. It was a quarter past two. When he arrived at the NKID building, he was received by the Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, Potemkin. The latter, standing, and not asking the Polish Ambassador to take a seat, read a Note. The very first words struck like a thunderbolt. Their impact made the whole room with its glaring lamps whirl round before Grzybowski's eyes. But he overcame his weakness, and erect but pale, listened to the end of the text which was being read to him. He must have been too dazed to follow it word for word, but he understood too well the general meaning. What else did he need to know but that the sentence of death was being passed upon his country? A few minutes later, Moscow Broadcasting Station would be publishing the news that, in partnership with Hitler, the Soviet Union had decided to dismember Poland and destroy its sovereignty and independence. In the Note, which he himself had signed, and in a later speech, Molotov stated that :

. . . . The Polish State has ceased to exist. The Red Army has received orders to cross the Polish frontier with the purpose of stretching out a brotherly hand to the peoples of Western Bielorussia and the Western Ukraine.

—By which he meant the integral Eastern territories of the Polish State.

In actual fact, it was a brotherly hand held out to . . . Hitler. The whole matter had been prearranged with

Herr von Ribbentrop in August. For this very reason, the demarcation line which divided Polish land between Moscow and Berlin has passed into history as the "Ribbentrop-Molotov Line."

But on that fateful night, when the hands of the clock pointed to 3.30 a.m., all this was yet unknown to the world. Nor was the Polish Ambassador aware of it. When the text of the Note had been read in that room of the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs, in the short silence which followed—a silence interrupted only by the heavy breathing of excited men—all Mr. Grzybowski knew was this—that the Soviet Union had informed him of its decision to stab his country in the back when it was already weakening in its struggle against Hitler. A lump in his throat and a dryness in his mouth hindered speech. By a great effort of will, he overcame them.

"I protest and I refuse to acknowledge the receipt of this Note!" That was all he said.

It was only after he had returned to his office that he recovered from the shock. He immediately sat down to write a formal note of protest.

But even before dawn had time to unveil the finials of the Kremlin's spires, at 4.20 a.m.—the very same hour at which Hitler's armies had crossed the western frontiers of Poland seventeen days before—the Red Army crossed Poland's eastern border. In doing so the caterpillars of the several armoured tank brigades, the hoofs of the cavalry regiments, the wheels of the motorised troops followed by the boots of the infantry divisions were trampling and tearing to shreds the treaties and obligations of the Soviet Union to the Polish State.

While moving forward, Soviet troops spread false rumours amongst the population around them, that they were on their way to help Poland in her fight against Germany. In many places, where contact with the Central Authorities had been interrupted,

Polish garrisons were duped and let themselves be led astray. But in most cases Polish units put up an obstinate although desperate and hopeless resistance against the crushing preponderance of the Soviet troops. But whatever the attitude of the Polish units towards the advance of the Red Army, the same fate awaited all officers and other ranks who did not fall in action. It was imprisonment.

The first to become victims were, of course, the men of the Polish Frontier Defence Corps (K.O.P.). Soldiers and their officers were either murdered on the spot or immediately deported to Russia. From amongst those who survived and managed later to avoid imprisonment or escape and join the Polish troops abroad, many gave detailed reports. These reports were gathered together, catalogued and numbered, and to-day form substantial archives kept as evidence, safely out of the reach of Russian-dominated Poland. It is worthwhile to quote a few extracts from this documentary material.

A member of the Frontier Defence Corps (Catal. No. 5573) states :

After having been taken prisoner, we were forced to run about two miles, with both hands held above the head. Next, we were stripped naked, searched and robbed of anything of value which was found on us. After the search, we were formed into a column of fours, and after having had our names taken down in writing, we were marched off about twenty miles, without a pause and with no water. The treatment was brutal, the language coarse, and whoever was weak enough to lag behind, was beaten with rifle butts, and if anyone fell, he was stabbed through with bayonets. I saw four such cases. I remember distinctly Captain Krzemienski from Warsaw whom I saw stabbed repeatedly with bay-

onets, and how, in the end, a Russian soldier shot the exhausted and prostrate man twice in the head.

Any resistance, either on the part of army units or the civilian population, was smashed, sometimes in a most ruthless way. In Grodno, 130 cadets and ensigns who offered resistance were murdered. One of the cadets was bound to a tank and dragged through the streets head downwards on the cobbles. Near Grodno, in Sopockinie, the Russians murdered the commander of the Third District Command, General Wilczynski, together with all his officers.

In the neighbourhood of Augustow, twenty policemen were murdered.

Particularly numerous were the acts of terror and murder committed around the towns of Wolkowysk, Swislocz, Oszmiana and Molodeczno.

Fighting took place around Orany. In the district of Polesie, during the fighting 150 officers were killed, while of the 120 taken prisoner, some were executed on the spot and others deported to Russia, although freedom had been promised to all.

Heavy fighting occurred near Kowel. Brzesc-Litewski<sup>1</sup> was already in the hands of the Germans except for the citadel, which was shelled simultaneously by Nazi and Soviet artillery.

Gruesome scenes of maltreatment occurred at the disarmament of Polish officers in Chodorow, Tarnopol, Nowogrodek, Sarny, Kosow, Zloczow and Rohatyn. From Rohatyn (Stanislawow district) comes the following story :

Soviet troops entered at about 4 p.m. and immediately started a most loathsome and terrible slaughter and torture of their victims. Not only members

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<sup>1</sup> Generally known in the West as Brest-Litovsk.

of the Polish forces and of the Police were murdered but also anyone classed amongst the "bourgeoisie," women and children included. Those amongst the servicemen who were spared and only disarmed, were gathered on a marshy meadow and ordered to lie down flat on the ground. There were about 800 of them stretched out on the grass. Machine guns were set up in such a way that the line of fire was fixed at a level just above their heads, and whenever a head was raised, a series of shots was fired over the crowd lying down. They were held that way through the whole night. The next morning they were all driven towards Stanislawow and from there deported to Russia.

The Soviet Commander of the so-called "Ukrainian Front," which stretched over the south-eastern part of Poland, was Marshal Timoshenko, whose name later became famous in the first stages of the Russo-German campaign, before it suddenly vanished from newspaper headings. It was he who had issued a Proclamation to Polish soldiers in 1939, after the Red Army had crossed the Polish frontier, which ran as follows :

**SOLDIERS !** In the last few days, the Polish Army has been finally destroyed. The soldiers from such towns as Tarnopol, Halicz, Rowno, Dubno, numbering over six thousand, have crossed over to us of their own free will. Soldiers, what has been left to you? What are you fighting for? Why are you risking your lives? Your resistance is useless. Your officers are driving you to senseless slaughter. They hate you and your families. It was they who had shot the delegates whom you sent to us with a proposition of surrender. Do not believe your officers. It is the officers and generals who are your enemies and they wish your death !



Soldiers—strike against your officers and generals ! Do not obey the orders of your officers. Drive them out of your land. Do not fear us, come over to us, to your brethren, to the Red Army. Here you shall find care and esteem.

Remember that only the Red Army will deliver the Polish Nation from this unfortunate war and you shall have an opportunity to restart your lives anew. Believe us—the Red Army is your only friend !

(Signed) S. TIMOSHENKO

C-in-C of the Ukrainian Front.

This manifesto, apart from being wilfully false and containing a lie about the alleged execution of an imaginary delegation of Polish soldiers by Polish Officers, did not affect the soldiers, who till the very end remained loyal and true to their officers. But the Polish Army caught in the double grip of German and Soviet assault had, in reality, collapsed and ceased to exist.

In consequence, how many soldiers and officers fell into the hands of the Bolsheviki as prisoners ?

Before we answer that question, we must deal first with a problem which, at first sight, has little to do with the waging of war. It is the problem of Soviet mentality and Soviet methods which are so utterly different from those in general acceptance by the rest of the world. Bolshevism has its own moral code, its own conception of justice based on a completely different outlook on world affairs and a totally alien way of reasoning. The grounds of that morality are not those accepted elsewhere, their justice is not based on the unbiased estimate of the actions of an individual. It is weighed according to the subjective value of every action to Party aims embodied by the state of the Soviet Union, and it excuses everything which such aims may require for their accomplishment. Because of this, the choice

of method adopted is solely judged by its utility towards fulfilment of these aims. Hence the methods to which Bolshevism takes recourse are absolutely ruthless in the broadest sense of the word. This digression is made here, not only so that we should understand but even find some excuse for the many sides of Soviet activity in that fateful month of war. Apart from the violence and the outrages witnessed, there were both treachery and falsehood, apparently quite inexplicable.

Apart from the initial excuse claiming that the Red Army had come to support Poland in her fight against German aggression, this treachery consisted of false promises widely proclaimed and spread amongst the Polish Army, notwithstanding the terrorism introduced and the ruthless quenching of any resistance offered by local centres still engaged upon a desperate and hopeless defence. These promises went so far as to guarantee to all officers and other ranks that after surrendering their arms and loyally registering with the Soviet Military Authorities, they would be offered the free choice of either going quietly home, or, if they wished, crossing the Rumanian or Hungarian frontiers to join the Polish Army which was being formed abroad to continue the fight against the Germans.

The aims of this treacherous action are plain enough to-day. It was a measure taken to ensure that all such elements which were looked upon by Bolshevik doctrine as "class enemies" and which were most immune to the latter's spell, would not disperse freely throughout the country, concealing themselves, and possibly in the future becoming the core of an underground Resistance Movement. In other words, it aimed at bringing this "class enemy" element to the surface like froth, in order to collect it and destroy it in conformity with the principles and methods of Bolshevism.

This action, with varying results, unfortunately

mostly successful, was started simultaneously in various parts of the occupied country. On a very large scale it was applied in the district of Lwow.

It seemed that even Nature, in view of so many atrocities and injustices befalling a single country, shrouded her face. At the same time as the Soviet blow, the weather changed and the skies clouded, while gale winds began to tear the autumn leaves from the trees, just as the war tore human beings away from their homes and from life itself. Rain began to pester both vanquished and victors. On the 12th of September the Germans had approached the city of Lwow. The city, although surrounded by an iron ring, held on. It held on with the soldiers standing knee-deep in slush and mud, into which the pouring rain dissolved the blood of those who had fallen in defence of their country.

The defence of Lwow was commanded by General Langner.

## II

### BROKEN PROMISES

**G**ENERAL Langner, Commander of the Polish garrison in Lwow, never surrendered the city to the Germans. But when the Soviet Army approaching from the east came to support the Germans, the situation, naturally, became hopeless. After the arrival of the Bolsheviks, the Germans withdrew their surrounding forces from the eastern side, and later they let the entire initiative pass to the Red Army.

On the 21st of September, 1939, the tenth day of the siege, there was not only no possibility of success for the defenders, but also no further strategic point in continuing the defence in view of the complete collapse of organised resistance throughout the country. The defence was maintained because it had become a habit—because of military honour. That day in front of the Polish lines, a white flag was waved by Soviet delegates. The Soviet officers, smiling benevolently, made it understood that all this fighting between the Polish and Red Armies was due to nothing but a tragic misunderstanding.

The delegation was led by General Ivanov, a personal envoy from Marshal Timoshenko, and he was accompanied by a few high-ranking officers. They asked to be granted an interview with the Commander of the defending troops. General Langner, accompanied by General Rakowski, Major Jawicz and Captain Czychiryn, agreed to negotiate. He stated that, in view of the uselessness of any further bloodshed, he was ready to capitulate provided that . . .

"But of course!" broke in General Ivanov. "I

know in advance what you want to say. I am fully authorised by Marshal Timoshenko"—he slightly bowed his head as he mentioned the name of his superior officer—"to communicate to you that the conditions of surrender will be as mild and honourable as possible."

"What do you mean by honourable?"

"Who? I? H'm . . . And what are the terms that you gentlemen insist upon?"

"If you want a concrete and final answer I think we ought to discuss the points in detail."

"I don't think there's any need for that. In Marshal Timoshenko's name, I can offer you the following terms. All officers and other ranks, after having surrendered their arms, will be free and, if they wish, may return to their homes or, if they prefer, they may go over the Hungarian or Rumanian frontiers, to try single-handed to reach the newly organised Polish Army in France. Moreover, those who choose to return home, will receive protection from the Soviet Authorities and all possible help in the form of transport and food for their journey."

Naturally it was not possible to dream of better conditions. The truce was signed. The capitulation was supposed to take place next day on the 22nd of September at 3 p.m.

That evening, as General Langner was passing along a dark corridor in the building of the District Corps Command, a voice called to him out of the darkness.

"General! They'll never keep their word. They'll murder us all like mad dogs . . ."

The General did not answer. Perhaps he never heard? Only the clatter of his footsteps broke the silence, and together with the tinkle of his spurs grew fainter as he passed out of sight down that dark passage.

Candour? Ingenuousness? Naïveté? Did not the General know about the Proclamation to the Polish

Army issued by the very same Timoshenko in whose name General Ivanov spoke? But in actuality the Proclamation was not known to the besieged garrison of Lwow. The time was measured . . . The time was running short . . . And the next day it was already too late.

All the officers, in obedience to the orders issued, left their arms in the building of the Corps Headquarters. Then they gathered in a column on the Lyczakowska Road by which they wished to leave the city in the direction of Winniki on the way to the Rumanian frontier. As they stood there, they were suddenly surrounded by a cordon of Soviet troops with fixed bayonets and firearms at the ready.

"March on!" They were all driven towards the city's boundaries.

"What do you mean by this outrage?" protested General Langner to General Ivanov. "What about the conditions you have signed?"

"Oh, don't worry! The terms will be adhered to in every detail. We must safeguard your officers. There might be some misunderstanding with our own detachments on the way and there are plenty of armed bands about. It's war-time . . . You do understand? You shall all be escorted to Tarnopol and from there either home or abroad according to wish, as we have agreed."

Tarnopol.

A small town in the south-east corner of Poland. Barbed wire. Guards. All officers treated as prisoners. Presentiments of evil weigh increasingly on their minds but no one, as yet, dares to admit this to himself, much less to voice his doubts amongst his comrades. No! It's unthinkable that such a treachery could be committed . . . And the men forget their experience, all the facts, all the pacts of much greater importance already cynically trampled on, torn and cast into ob-

livion like those leaves which are falling from the trees around them to rustle under their feet, and which, after rotting throughout the winter, will vanish forever with the coming of spring. People usually believe what they wish to believe.

During the 24th and 25th of September, General Langner continually pleads for some explanation, requests the promised freedom for his men and persistently claims a personal interview with Marshal Timoshenko. At last Timoshenko does speak to him on the telephone :

"Yes, of course, I do know about everything. The agreement will be honoured, yes, undoubtedly . . . but, there exist certain circumstances . . . you see, I also receive orders from Moscow . . . I shall attempt to enable you to go personally to Moscow. How would that suit you ?"

"I should be very much obliged."

"Very well, then."

A day passes again. And yet another . . . The third one drags slowly along, as slowly as the bugs which crawl over the damp wall of the prison barrack. But at last, on the 28th of September, General Langner with General Rakowski and Major Jawicz are taken to an airfield and enter a plane. The propellers are set in motion, and the airstream ruffles the grass and makes ripples in the puddles . . .

It was a long and wearisome journey. The aeroplane was bumped about in thick clouds and the visibility was bad. Moscow at last . . . The same Moscow which . . . Oh, better forget it. But instead of to Moscow from the aerodrome, the Polish officers are driven away to Kuncovo, a little place an hour's drive from the capital. To a house standing alone, surrounded by a high fence, a sort of Russian styled *datcha* (villa) full of guards in NKVD uniforms with pistols in their belts. Again the days drag along and again the autumn rain beats against the window panes. In truth it is only

the beginning of autumn, and somewhere over there, in their own country, thousands of prisoners await the decision of their fate. But are they all still waiting there? What has happened to them by this time? Are not these negotiations only a mockery? What the hell are we kept here for? One day, two, three are wasted in waiting. On the fourth day, an elegant limousine arrives.

"Where are we supposed to go?"

"General Shaposhnikov wishes to see you."

General Shaposhnikov, the famous Soviet commander and future Chief of Staff, soon to be more famous for the first Finnish campaign. He smiles from behind his desk, gets up and walks round to greet his guests with politeness, asking immediately:

"You do smoke? Have a cigarette!" He offers them a brand not obtainable to one in ten thousand of Soviet citizens.

"I have just heard"—while he spoke he continually rubbed his clean-shaven cheeks with the palm of his hand—"that you have arrived by air. What can I do for you, gentlemen?"

He leaned back in his comfortable chair, let out a cloud of smoke, and lowered his hand to the arm of his chair with graceful ease. His behaviour was natural and pleasant. The light in the room was also pleasant, with the sun pouring in through the windows. It did not rain that day. Little white clouds drifted over the blue sky like wisps of cotton wool.

The Polish officers feel tired and exhausted. Their uniforms are crumpled. Their country had been trampled upon . . . "He had just heard . . . !"

"I wish to remind you, General, of the conditions of our capitulation," speaks General Langner, "which were agreed upon and signed by the representatives of Marshal Timoshenko. We request the fulfilment of those terms."



Shaposhnikov leans slightly forward as he answers. His voice is both solemn and clear and he taps his desk with the blunt end of a pencil, to stress every word he says.

"All the terms shall be fulfilled. The entire world knows that no other country fulfils its obligations so strictly as the Soviet Union."

Jeering? No . . . He looks straight into their eyes and though his glance is rather weary, it holds no mockery.

Silence fell, such a silence that it seemed to ring in their ears. When the door opened, those in the room started nervously, although the door had opened quietly. A man in uniform stood on the threshold, his eyes turned with enquiry towards General Shaposhnikov.

"Would you care for a cup of tea?" asked the General.

"No, thank you."

Shaposhnikov made a sign with his hand, still holding the pencil, and the man withdrew, closing the door softly behind him.

"Well, then, yes . . ." he said and sighed. "*That* question is settled. But since you have come here now, General"—he turned towards Langner—"I have something else . . . You must know all the details of the former fortifications on the late Polish frontier in your Corps District. Or anyhow, I hope so. Could you tell me please—"and from beneath a pile of official documents lying on the table, he produced a map.

"Do you really think that I could know any more than you do at the present moment?" answers Langner. "All the forts are in your hands. It's impossible for me to know now as much as you do."

"H'm . . . Yes, that may well be true." Shaposhnikov with a discouraged gesture pushed away the map. It seemed that he had only touched on this subject as an opening for some other topic. But whatever it was to be, it never emerged. Instead, he asked:

"Anything else I can do for you, gentlemen? Any requests?"

"Nothing more. We only wished to intervene in this matter, to speed up the fulfilment of the terms, to free the soldiers and the officers as had been promised to us."

"I can add nothing more to what I have already said." Shaposhnikov spread out his hands in a gesture to stress his helplessness. "On my part I give you my word that everything will be quite all right. You shall return and see for yourselves. Maybe by now your men have already been released."

But their return is again delayed by a few days. Obviously the matter does not seem so urgent to the Soviet authorities as it does to General Langner.

The return flight to Lwow takes place under much better weather conditions. But the exhausted passengers do not observe the details of the landscape beneath them, in particular the railway track stretching like a thread from the late Polish frontier station, Zdobunow, eastwards towards Szepietowka and further. It is a pity . . . If they had watched it, they would surely have noticed the goods trains like little caterpillars heading towards Berdichev and Kiev with feathery plumes of smoke from the locomotives which laboriously travel further and further from the Polish frontier. It would have been interesting to know the loads carried by those wagons which looked like toys from the air. Of course from that height it would have been impossible to ascertain, or to pierce through the roofs of the wagons. But perhaps the Polish passengers might have guessed. No! Although tired and with their nerves overstrained, they are, on the whole rather pleased, and their minds have been set at rest. Were they not bringing back with them the solemn word of General Shaposhnikov himself?

Their amazement can therefore be easily imagined

when they learn, on arrival at Lwow, that large numbers of the disarmed officers and soldiers had already been secretly deported—apparently to Central Russia. General Langner refuses to believe in these rumours.

"It is only 'apparently,' " he answers. "It cannot be true. Haven't we got Marshal Timoshenko's assurance and the word of General Shaposhnikov?"

"You will soon find proof enough, General," he is informed.

As a matter of fact, that is made easy just then because Marshal Timoshenko's Headquarters have been moved into Lwow. General Langner, who has retained the right to move freely about the town, goes there immediately. Timoshenko grants him an interview. He explains politely: "As to the fulfilment of our conditions, I still haven't received any instructions from Moscow."

The next day.

"I couldn't get through on the phone to Moscow."

On the third day.

"Oh please, do have patience for another few days . . ."

And after "another few days," General Langner is arrested in his own flat and an NKVD guard set around it.

None of the terms signed had been kept by the Soviet partner. The majority of the soldiers who had laid down their arms, all the officers, all the members of the State Police Force, and all members of the Frontier Defence Corps had been crammed into cattle wagons and driven off into the depths of Russia. Not only was it contrary to the terms of capitulation but it was carried out under conditions which would raise a wave of indignation if applied to the worst criminals. Driven on by bayonet stabs and blows from rifle-butts, in filth and incredible overcrowding, suffering from hunger and thirst they travelled eastwards towards some unknown goal. Only very few managed to escape.

Amongst these was General Langner himself, who somehow slipped out and succeeded in crossing the Rumanian frontier.

So ended the first act of the Drama.

In the whole case of the Katyn crime and in the mystery of the disappearance of these Polish officers, a mystery hidden and unsolved in the years of war, one fact is incontestable and beyond shadow of doubt. Before they vanished, all these men had been imprisoned by the Bolsheviks and on Soviet territory.

In Chapter I we put the question—How many Polish prisoners were deported to Russia? Nobody will ever know the correct figure. Official Russian reports published on the anniversary of the Soviet attack on Poland, boast that in September, 1939, the following number of prisoners were captured:

10 Generals, 52 Colonels, 72 Lt.-Colonels, 5,131 officers of lower rank, 40,966 N.C.O.s and 181,223 soldiers.

These figures do not seem to include the Police Force, the Military Police and the Frontier Defence Corps. Those deported later on as result of the "Registration" and individual arrests which went on all through the winter of 1939-1940 are never mentioned by Russian sources. In reality the total figure must be much higher than that revealed by the Soviet statement issued a year after the aggression.

What happened to all these men?

### III

## FIFTEEN THOUSAND PRISONERS VANISH

THE vast territory of Russia, stretching from the Polish frontier, over the deserts and steppes of Asia right to the shores of the Pacific Ocean, does seem immeasurable. But it is immeasurable only to those who have never essayed its measurement; to those who know about it rather from literature than from a knowledge of present realities in Russia. And, in fact, it is no easy task to realise the multitudes of people who inhabit it, the complexity of their intermingled fates, or their differing characteristics which are all brought together on this immense stretch of land. Anyone looking at it from afar, or even the privileged tourist who is allowed to visit the Soviet Union and pass up and down its territory, might easily be deceived by the vastness and assume that a single human being could get lost as easily in that vast space as a drop of water in the ocean. It might also seem that anyone who would take the risk of plunging into that immense throng of tribes and languages could easily disappear and hide from the world, and, if he chose, reappear unnoticed at the other end of this continent which covers one sixth of the earth's surface; that he could mix undisguised with the crowds, and if necessary disappear once more beneath the surface.

There is no greater illusion than such an idea about present-day Russia which ceased to be "Russia" thirty years ago and became something new—the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. There is nothing more

difficult than to conceal oneself from the ever-watchful eyes of the authorities—the bureaucracy and the police, especially the Security Police. The “immeasurable spaces” of Russia have been measured now, accurately to a square yard. Not a single thing exists in Soviet Russia which has not been registered, catalogued or noted down in this or that way. The authorities of the Totalitarian Police State have penetrated every nook and corner, into every human soul, and they not only know of the existence of the most miserable little swineherd, but they also know in what province he lives and in which communal farm, how much he earns, what he eats, of what he talks and even what he thinks ! In Soviet Russia, a man does not only have a shadow to follow him in the sunshine, he also has his index card . . . And it follows him in both sunshine and rain, in drizzle and snowstorm ; it never leaves him even in his uneasy sleep. It binds him in fetters from which there is no escape.

Nothing ever happens in the Soviet Union which is not by the order of the authorities. The strength and power of that authority is derived from its omnipresence, while the ease with which it rules these multitudes of people is based upon the deliberate stagnancy and ignorance in which they are kept.

In the whole world there is no other country which can have a greater constriction of space than that which exists in these “immeasurable distances” of the Soviet Union. Without permission, no peasant can leave his farm, no worker his factory, no townsman his city.<sup>1</sup> What happens beyond the meagre existence

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<sup>1</sup> By a Decree introduced 27th December, 1932 (Law reports 84-516), compulsory Home-passports were established for all Soviet citizens by which they were deprived of the right to travel freely within the boundaries of the Soviet State. Absence of any citizen for more than 24 hours from his usual place of residence had to be immediately reported to the Police. The entry to any town classified as industrial or even its surrounding zone (which varied from a radius of 20 km. to 100 km.) was only allowed by a special permit.

which keeps him chained to his workshop is unknown to the average citizen, who can only guess. And so the State authorities can rule in absolute autocracy without any control, moral or material, being exercised over their powers.

That is how in Soviet Russia, not merely a single human being but thousands of them can vanish like that proverbial drop of water. But it can only happen if it is the wish of the authorities. And the "general public" will never know what has happened to those who have disappeared. For there is no such thing as a "general public" in the normal sense of the word.

And just as many years are needed before the drips of water can pierce through stone, many years are needed to get the final truth about the Soviet Union, whenever the authorities wish to conceal anything from common knowledge. It needs years to fill up and match the odd pieces of the jig-saw puzzle, gathered from various stories, hints, opinions and memories, before the whole picture can emerge as a clear and logical entity.

Therefore, to answer the question as to what happened to some 200,000 Polish prisoners deported to Russia in the autumn and winter of 1939-1940, we must jump a few years to a time in which after long research and assembly of thousands of reports by various witnesses, it becomes possible to establish a fairly accurate image of what really happened.

The fate of soldiers of lower rank varied. Most of

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In the decree introduced on 8th June, 1934, published in *Isvestia* on 9th June, 1934, we read:

"In the case of desertion by a military person, adult members of his family, if found guilty of being accomplices in that act of treason, or if they had knowledge that desertion was being planned and failed to inform the appropriate authorities, shall be liable to a penalty of imprisonment ranging from 5 to 10 years together with the confiscation of their property. Other adult members of the family will be deprived of their electoral rights and subject to deportation into distant Siberian districts."

The decrees of 28th June and 24th July, 1940, introduced the penalty of compulsory hard labour for having wilfully changed employment, absenteeism from work, late arrival at work, and laziness.

them were released at different periods after very painful experiences while in confinement. As to the officers, members of the Police Force and Military Police, they were assembled in three enormous prisoner-of-war camps :

3,920 servicemen in Starobielsk.

About 4,500 officers of various ranks in Kozielsk.

6,567 various military personnel in Ostashkov.

*In all 14,987.*

Of course this figure may not be absolutely correct and there might possibly be two hundred more or less.

From this total figure, the Soviet Authorities chose a certain number whom they transferred to a camp in Griazoviec, situated on the banks of the river Vologda. In due course, this group succeeded in regaining freedom, and it is mainly to them that we owe most of the information about the existence of the three camps mentioned above.

From them we know that in Starobielsk there were eight generals, about a hundred colonels and lieutenant-colonels, some three hundred and eighty medical officers and the rest officers of lower rank.

In Kozielsk, the total of 4,500 officers included six generals, nearly 400 M.O.s, 29 Catholic Chaplains, and as well as the remaining officers of lower rank—three women. Two of the women were taken away quite soon, no one knew where, but the third one, a Flight-Lieutenant of the Polish Air Force, remained till the end, i.e. till the camp was wound up.

In Ostashkov the prisoners were mostly composed of Police, Military Police and soldiers of the Frontier Defence Corps, of whom 400 were officers. There were also many eminent civilians, mainly lawyers, including public prosecutors, landowners, etc.

Whoever has passed through such camps, and even those who have only read of them and of other concentration camps and dungeons in the Soviet Union (de-



scribed in the many memoirs and autobiographies written to open the eyes of the West European and American public) would scarcely find any particularly interesting novelty in the lives of these men confined in these three camps. Today the Soviet Union holds some fifteen to twenty million people in concentration camps. To these we must add the occupants of the many Soviet prisons which are always full. In addition to all these, there are countless forced-labour camps. The miserable existence of all these millions does not vary very much. Barracks through which in winter a cold wind whistles and snow creeps under the door and through the chinks and holes of the building. Sometimes it would be in a former monastery or Orthodox church from which God had been expelled and prisoners' plank beds set up. Bugs, lice and filth. Lack of space, lack of water. Food barely sufficient to keep them alive. Barbed wire and machine guns on turrets. Brutal treatment. Low cloudy sky from early autumn until late spring. Frost in winter, heat in summer. A terrible dreary hopelessness and a gnawing yearning for one's own country and lost freedom. Obligatory attendance at talks and lectures giving information about the joyful and happy existence in the Soviet paradise and about the misery, famine, oppression and tyranny which exist in the capitalist countries . . . Add to that a total bann on all religious services or gatherings. And above all—interrogations. Over and over again, enquiries following enquiries, endlessly and persistently repeated roll-calls, enquiries, the checking of lists and index forms and then enquiries again.

On the whole, all the descriptions of life in the three camps in question vary very little, and scarcely help in throwing light on what happened to the prisoners after the Spring of 1940. But it must be stressed that however much life in the Ostashkov, Starobielsk and Kozielsk camps resembled the general condition of

millions of prisoners all over Russia, there exist certain special features which show the close analogy between these three camps, and the quite identical inner discipline, general treatment and attitude of the camp authorities towards the prisoners.

Amongst the numerous gruesome stories (most of which are rather useless from our point of view) there exists, however, one report supplied by a Lieut. Mlynarski, who was one of the prisoners interned in Starobielsk and later transferred to Griazoviec, from which, for special reasons, we think the following extracts worth quoting :

In the middle of December, 1939, we were granted permission to correspond with our families. The fight for this most elementary right had been going on from the very first days after our arrival. We were persistently promised that "of course," and "at any moment" or "maybe tomorrow" . . . In the middle of December it did really happen. The address of the recipient had to be written in the language of the country of his residence, to which we had to add in phonetic Russian :

(1) USSR, (2) Prisoner-of-war Camp ; (3) Starobielsk ; (4) Post Office Box no-155 ; (5) Name and Christian name in its Polish spelling without mentioning the military rank of the sender.

We were allowed to write once a month. By the end of December, we already began to receive the first answers from Poland, and even from abroad.

In March, 1940, we were allowed to send one telegram each. I suppose these must have been the last news from Starobielsk to reach our families in the country. During the time it lasted, the incoming post accumulated from week to week. The delivery was not regulated by any special orders. It was distributed in the order in which it arrived.

The outward correspondence was stopped about the 10th of April, 1940, while the incoming post lasted until the 26th of April, from which day all correspondence ceased.

It so happened that this same Lieut. Mlynarski, in his statement given to the Polish Military Authorities on the 1st of November, 1941, mentioned yet another detail which, without his even being conscious of it, in time to come became decisive evidence. When speaking of the Soviet propaganda hawked about the camp, he stated :

Propaganda of a more general character, dealing with State policy, was brought into the camp by means of the radio, the Moscow daily press (*Pravda* and *Izvestia*), by a few minor newspapers from Kharkov and by films. Further to these Russian newspapers mentioned, we used to receive particularly abundant copies of the *Głos Radziecki* ("the Union's Voice"), a paper printed in mutilated Polish somewhere in Kharkov or Kiev. That rag made our blood boil but after we had once read it we found it very useful . . .

Well, so everybody had plenty of Soviet newspapers ! But note must be taken of the *Głos Radziecki*. It was the title of a Communist newspaper printed in Polish. More will be heard about it, later on . . .

We are still in the middle of the winter of 1940, the one which started the series of particularly cold and frosty winters. From stuffy huts or brick barracks, crowded with guiltless convicts, interned against all law, drifts stale and rotten air, steaming in the cold. Their lives drag on in the rhythm of a pendulum which swings from despair to hope, and back again from hope to despair.

Everything is quiet on the Western Front. The Soviet Union, taking advantage of the pact with Hitler to set foot firmly on one half of Poland and establish military bases in the Baltic States, now in turn has attacked Finland. There is a saying that a drowning man clutches at a straw. When the Finnish campaign started, the people slowly drowning in the vastness of the Soviet Union clung to that new development with all the strength of their fading hopes. But Finland could be nothing else than a straw. After a few months of heroic fighting, it had to give in, and signed a truce in March, 1940.

In the same month, March, 1940, the first transport of Polish officers from Kozielsk camp was sent to Smolensk. A document describing in detail this happening is kept by the Polish Government in London, and it was made known to the Highest British Authorities :

Early in the evening of March 8th, 1940, the soldiers of the Camp guard in Kozielsk began to pick out certain officers from various barracks. After checking their identity by a list, they ordered them to pack their belongings immediately, and hastening them brutally, they led them one by one to the administration building where they were all thoroughly searched. From there they were led in little groups of two to three men each, under the escort of two NKVD armed guards, out of the camp to the railway station situated five miles away. The temperature was about thirty degrees below freezing point, and it was a most exhausting march, the officers having to carry their things, in darkness, along a slippery and uneven snow-covered road, perpetually hastened by the convoy. When one of the prisoners, an elderly retired Colonel, began to lose his strength, he was brutally pushed and driven on by the escort amidst frightful cursing and mockery.

After a journey which lasted three days during which the train waited longer at various stations than it ever travelled forward, the prisoners reached Smolensk which is about 125 miles distant from the camp. . .

They were unloaded from the wagon there, ordered into a column, and instructed by one of the escorting guards that during the march they were to keep in order, not try and communicate with each other, not to look round and not to lag behind. At any attempt at escape, even half a step sideways, the guards would open fire without further warning. They were led over the rail tracks to a side-street entrance where they were ordered to kneel in the snow. After about quarter of an hour, a black painted bus drove up and the prisoners were ordered to rise from their knees and enter it.

The bus was specially adapted for transporting prisoners. It had a narrow corridor in the middle with low and narrow doors on both sides of the whole length. After the prisoner had entered the corridor an NKVD guard waiting inside ordered him to enter quickly backwards into one of the little cell-like cabins. These cells were quite dark and so small that they barely held a doubled up man. It was for the first time that the prisoners saw with their own eyes one of the prison coaches famous throughout the Soviet Union as the *czornyj woron* (Black raven). Some of them, with their nerves at breaking point, tired by the unending bullying, the mystery of the whole journey and the queer behaviour of their oppressors, recoiled. They were brutally pushed in, the door slammed behind them, and the next was called to follow.

It must be mentioned that in Kozielsk the prisoners were led from the barrack one by one, and to the station and in the train, two or three at a time. Due

to this strict isolation, they knew nothing about their companions until they all met for the first time at the station in Smolensk.

While travelling in the train each prisoner separately tried in vain to make out the reason why he was taken away from the camp, by analysing his past, especially his behaviour in the camp. After finding themselves together again, they all tried to draw some conclusions as to their future, from the choice which led to them all being picked out in that particular group. But their set was so mixed that they could not find any logical clue to give them a hint. In all there were fourteen officers, amongst them Stanislaw Lipkind Lubodziecki, Judge Advocate of the Highest Chamber of Justice, Col. G. Starzenski, former Polish Military Attaché in Belgium, Capt. Radziszewski, a functionary of the Recruiting Office, a lieutenant in the Navy, a Silesian former member of the Rising against the Germans in 1921, etc. . . .

. . . After twenty-minutes' drive in the bus, they were unloaded in a small yard surrounded by tall buildings with grated windows.

. . . that is how, on the afternoon of 13th March, 1940, the group of prisoners which left Kozielsk on 8th March was separated in the prison courtyard in Smolensk, and from then on all trace of them vanished for ever.

From amongst them all, only one prisoner was found; he was taken from Smolensk to give evidence in a trial at Kharkov, and later managed to escape from the USSR and related the story given above.

About three weeks after this incident in Smolensk, on the 3rd of April, 1940, began the regular disbandment of the Kozielsk camp. The prisoners were sent away in groups varying from 60 to 200 persons. The disbandment took until the 12th of May.

Almost exactly at the same time and in precisely the same manner, started the disbandment of the camps at Starobielsk and Ostashkov.

This particular act of drama is probably the best known, because those prisoners who, as already mentioned, were assembled at Giazowiec, and after 1941 regained their freedom, not only supplied detailed reports, but some even published their memoirs. But at the time these appeared in print they could not produce the desired result because they only described one link in the long chain which led to the solution of the terrible crime.

For example, a Polish officer, under the pen-name of Jan Furtka, published a detailed report about the disbandment of the Kozielsk camp. It appeared in a Polish newspaper in America (*The Nowy Swiat*).

I am one of the Polish prisoners from Kozielsk. During the first day of April, 1940, the Soviet Authorities started the winding up of the camp. There were over 4,000 prisoners in Kozielsk at that time. The disbandment was organized in such a way that groups of about a hundred to three hundred persons were formed and then sent away. The departures took place at regular intervals. Of course all of us tried to guess what it meant and where they were sent. In spite of all suspicions, the opinion prevailed that they were sent back to Poland. Anyhow that was what we were told when we talked with the *Politruks* and the lower camp functionaries. They told us frankly that those sent away were handed over to the Germans and even mentioned the town of Brzesc as the place where the Germans took them over. I remember the first name to be read from the list in our barrack was Bychowiec, a young artillery captain, who acted as barrack commander. After moments of initial anxiety, those about to leave were filled with

joy. When, with one of these transports, our three generals were leaving the camp, the authorities organized for them a farewell dinner party in the "club," and at the moment of their departure, the whole camp cheered them goodbye.

I left Kozielsk on 26th April, 1940. The group to which I belonged numbered seventy prisoners. Before leaving, we were thoroughly searched. While waiting to be searched we saw Camp Commissar Dymidowicz coming towards us. He looked us over and said: "*No znaczący wy harasho popali.*"—"Well, it means that you can count yourselves lucky . . ." We had no idea what he meant by these words and whether it was an ironical comment or serious. To-day, I know he was sincere, because our group was the one which happened to escape from the slaughter.

Beyond the gates of the camp we were loaded into lorries which took us a roundabout way through the forest, avoiding the village, to a side track of the Kozielsk railway station. There we were loaded into prison railway-coaches and shut up. The train was composed of five or six coaches. Our group filled two of them. We remained about two hours on that track. Judging by the position of the sun, we left Kozielsk heading south-west. After a few hours we reached a railway junction, probably Suchienicze. When we started next the direction had changed to north-east. I made all that journey lying on the upper bunk of our wagon. On one of the boards forming its side wall I noticed an inscription made with a pencil or perhaps a match. It read: "We are unloaded two stations beyond Smolensk—transferred into cars," and a date, the second figure of which was doubtful. It might have been the "12th" or the "17th" April.

But apart from these individual, personal memoirs



relating to that particular period, there is a further record as far as Kozielsk is concerned. Those who were transferred to Giazoviec succeeded in jointly compiling a fairly accurate table of departing transports, which included notes, figures, dates and even the names of some of the prisoners who were remembered to have left on any particular day.

Where were the prisoners from Kozielsk sent in April and May of that year?

In the article quoted, Jan Furtka mentioned the inscription scribbled on the side of the wagon: "We are unloaded two stations beyond Smolensk . . ." A similar inscription was seen by a certain solicitor from Wilno, who, after having been arrested by the Soviet Authorities on 27th June, 1940, in Molodeczno, was sent through Minsk to Polotsk in a prison railway coach. Lying on the middle bunk he read to his astonishment an inscription on the board above his head.

"We are unloaded and transferred into cars near Smolensk."

Furthermore, there exists an eyewitness, Stanislaw S., a professor of Wilno University who was mobilised in the 1939 campaign as an officer of the reserve with the rank of Lieutenant. After the collapse of the Polish Army, together with many others he was taken prisoner and sent to Kozielsk camp. On 29th April, 1940, he was sent with a group of 300 officers in prison wagons to a station near Smolensk. In the meantime, the Smolensk NKVD received a telegram that a misunderstanding had occurred and Prof. S. was wanted for questioning in Moscow in some political affair. He was therefore separated from the remaining prisoners on that little station, and taken aside but in such a way that he managed to observe things by peeping through a little window. It was a small station situated in wooded country. All around were pine trees, soaring up towards the sky. A bus with covered

windows drove right up to the railway coaches and his comrades were loaded into it. The Professor wondered whether it was for better or for worse that he had been separated from them. Whose fate was to be enviable? The others were driven off into unknown wooded country!<sup>1</sup>

That little station was the Gniezdovo station situated about nine miles to the west of Smolensk.

While all that was happening in Kozielsk, the camp of Starobielsk was also being disbanded and its occupants sent off . . . where? It is very difficult to answer that question with precision.

Nobody gave a better and more moving description of the life of the miserable inhabitants of Starobielsk camp than did Major J. Czapski, painter, writer and soldier, himself a prisoner in Starobielsk. In his little book, *Starobielsk Memoirs*, he described in the following way, the mysterious disbandment of the camp:

From the middle of February, 1940, a rumour began circulating that we would be sent away from this camp . . . The camp authorities were spreading the rumour that the Russians were handing us over to the Allies and that we were going to be sent to France so that we could fight there. An official Soviet paper was even circulated which showed the route of the journey which was to lead through Bendery. On one occasion we were awakened in the night and asked which of us could speak Rumanian or Greek. All this created such an atmosphere of hope that, when in April small groups began to leave the camp, many of us believed that we were going to be set free. It was impossible to tell by what criterion the selection

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<sup>1</sup> Prof. S. was sent to Moscow and kept in prison there from which the authorities did not want to release him even in 1941 after an "amnesty" had been granted to all Poles on Soviet territory. It was only after several diplomatic interventions that he was finally set free.

was made of persons to be sent away from the camp. Age, rank, profession, social origin, political views—all were mixed up in the groups, and as each one left, it belied our previous theories on the subject. In one thing we were unanimous: each one of us feverishly awaited the moment when a new list of departures would be announced . . .

I was one of the last to leave Starobielsk; the surprises began already at the station. We were crowded into prison trucks, more than ten in each narrow, windowless and heavily barred semi-compartment. The guards were very brutal. In principle we were only let out twice a day to go to the lavatory. We were fed on herrings and water. It was terribly hot, people were fainting, and what was most striking was the characteristic complete indifference of the guards, who were, no doubt, already accustomed to this kind of work. My group was taken to a camp at Pavlishchev Bor; there I met several colleagues from Kozielsk and Ostashkov. In all there were about 400 of us. A few weeks later we were taken to Gрязoviec near Vologda where we remained till August, 1941. Once a month we were allowed to write to our families. The conditions under which we were living were better than at Starobielsk, and we were at first convinced that other camp-mates were in similar circumstances in other small camps somewhere in Russia.

We lived in an old building which used to be a Monastery. Its ancient church had been destroyed by dynamite . . .

J. Czapski's little book, translated into many languages, was quite popular in its time although the conclusions drawn by the author were but a guess . . .

To-day we know much more than he and others knew. Lieut. Mlynarski, mentioned already, acted as D.A.C.

to the so-called "Senior Officer" of the Starobielsk camp. The post of Senior Officer was held in turn by Major Zalewski, Major Niewiarowski and Major Chrystowski. On 5th April, 1940, it was Major Niewiarowski who held the post.

At about 9 a.m. that day, the Soviet camp commander, Lt.-Col. Boreshkov, with Kirshov, the political commissar, called upon the Senior Officer and told him that the camp was going to be wound up, and that same day the first group of 195 officers was to leave the camp.

"Where to?" asked Major Niewiarowski.

"Where? . . ." Boreshkov drawled his answer. "Home! To your own homes. You will be sent first to transit camps, and then—to where you came from, to your wives—he, he, he!"

And from then on, transports were sent out daily. In the mornings, roll-calls were held in the spacious room of the commander of block No. 20. The selected men were immediately searched there. The daily groups varied from 60 to 240 persons.

One day Lieut. Mlynarski asked Boreshkov: "Why do you send us away in groups of 240 at the most? Having brought us all here together in thousands, you could surely send us back the same way?"

"We can't," he answered. "The whole world is at war. We have to be ready too. We cannot spare the transport."

The 26th of April came. Suddenly the transports were cancelled. This lasted till the 2nd of May when a certain number were sent again. Then there was another delay until the 8th, 11th and the 12th of May on which days the last transports left Starobielsk. Those amongst the prisoners who later on reached Griazoviec were strictly ordered to keep apart from the others. When those still remaining in camp were heartily saying good-bye to those departing, the camp commander used to say ironically: "You will all soon meet again!"

What also was very striking, was that for each transport prisoners were chosen from various blocks. Special care was taken that no "brothers," no people belonging to the same "gang" or others who had formed small intimate circles of friends, were sent together. This was brought to the notice of the camp commander, always with the same result.

"No good! You will all meet again soon anyhow."

Where? That was the next question asked.

On the 25th of April in block No. 20 a "special list" of names was read out aloud. It included 63 names. The prisoners were loaded into railway trucks and sent to Voroshilovgrad and from there to Kharkov, where the train was held up. One of the prisoners managed to poke his face through a chink in the door. A railway worker happened to pass by, walking with slow measured steps. He was tapping the wheels of the train with a hammer.

"Comrade!" whispered the prisoner. "Is this Kharkov?"

"*Da* . . . (Yes) Kharkov. Prepare for leaving the train. That's where all 'yours' are being unloaded and sent further in cars."

"Where to?"

The railway worker shrugged his shoulders. Then he spat between the wheels and got on with his job.

This is all that is known . . .

The "special group" was not unloaded in Kharkov. In the end it reached Griazoviec where . . . they never found the other inmates of their camp.

What happened at the same time in Ostashkov was absolutely similar to the events described in Starobielsk and Kozielsk. The Ostashkov camp was in an ex-monastery, with the only difference that it was on an island in a lake. A bridge joined the island with the mainland. And in quite the same way, from 4th April,

1940, onwards, groups were formed, searched, and also assured that they were being sent home . . . There also some were chosen separately and finally sent to Griazoviec while the rest were crowded into railway prison coaches and sent . . . Where?

Senior Constable of the Polish Police Forces, A. Woronecki, related a conversation which he had at the time with one of the camp guards. The latter, after having accepted a pinch of the stinking black Soviet tobacco, agreed in exchange, as he called it himself, "to let the secret out."

"You'll never see your comrades again . . ."

"Why? Where are they?"

"It isn't true that they were sent home. Neither were they sent to other labour camps."

"Well, then . . . What is the truth?"

The guard smoothed out a scrap of newspaper which he used as cigarette paper, licked it with a solemn precision, rolled in the tobacco, stuck and pressed it. He then dug out from the depths of his thick trousers a home-made lighter, lit the cigarette, and only after he had let the first cloud of smoke from his nostrils, did he drawl through his teeth:

"They have drowned them all . . ."

Of course there is a possibility that the guard was only joking . . .

Military Police Sergeant J.B., who was also a prisoner in Ostashkov and whose report is kept in the archives of the Polish Army in the East, under catalogue No. 11,173, confirmed everything related by others:

The transports were sent in groups ranging from 60 to 300 each. He once wandered up to the bakery where he was on friendly terms with Nikityn, the chief baker. Of course their talk touched on the problem of the camp's disbandment.

"Where are they sending us? Don't you know?" asked the Sergeant.

"*Na sievier, bratku* (To the north, my friend). They are sending you somewhere to the north," answered Nikityn.

Later on the Sergeant found himself in a "special group" which was sent together with a larger group of some 300 Polish policemen on the 28th of April 1940. They actually did go *na sievier*—northwards, along the Leningrad railway line. At Bologoje, the wagon with the "special group" was detached from the rest of the train and sent in the direction of Rhzev. As it left, the Sergeant could see all that remained of the train still standing on a side-track of the Bologoje station.

\* \* \* \* \*

From the total of prisoners interned in those three camps, the Soviet authorities picked out the following number of prisoners, who were first sent to a camp in Pavlishchev Bor and later on to Griazoviec.

From Ostashkov	....	120	persons
„ Starobielsk	....	86	„
„ Kozielsk	....	200	„
		<hr/>	
In all		406	„
		<hr/>	

These 406, together with another 50 or so singled out and sent individually to Moscow prisons for the purpose of interrogation long before the disbandment of the camps, were the only ones who survived until the "amnesty" which was granted to all Poles on the strength of the Soviet-Polish Agreement signed on the 30th July, 1941. They were also the only ones to regain freedom.

The rest, that is about 14,700 men, amongst whom were some 8,400 officers, have disappeared since that spring of 1940 without a trace.

## IV

### ANXIETY IN POLAND

**B**UT what makes it certain that these 15,000 prisoners disappeared at no other time but in the spring of 1940? Why not earlier or later, why was it certain that in April and May of that year, all connection with them was severed?

It was the first spring of the Second World War, and perhaps that is why so many people remember it very well, I amongst them. While the whole world's attention was concentrated upon the events taking place in Western Europe, in our part of the world which was under Soviet domination, life remained stagnant and dreary in contrast to the buds now bursting out on the trees. Hope was our daily bread. We lived on it and sought for it in every fresh leaf of the daily calendar. People expected so much from that spring, but when it came it brought nothing but bad news, and finally to so many, the very worst.

"All communications have ceased from Starobielsk, Kozielsk and Ostashkov."

At first people spoke of this with sorrow, later with anxiety, and finally panic seized upon them. If we assume that each one of those who had vanished left behind only three members of his family in Poland, that in itself would amount to 45,000 people, wives, mothers, fathers, children, brothers, sisters and other people who cared, and who were now suddenly seized by grave anxiety. In actuality, there were many more of these people. This uneasiness started in May, 1940, and increased in strength, month by month.



Readers will remember that the prisoners in these three camps were allowed to correspond with their families, and there are many reports of how that correspondence was regulated; for example there is the statement of Lieutenant Mlynarski.

I myself knew many people, including some of my own relatives, who corresponded with the prisoners in these camps. All of a sudden, in April, no more news reached us from any of the three camps. People waited through the month of May, blaming the inefficiency of the Soviet Postal Service for the delay. But still no letters came . . . It was only when some of the letters sent to the camps were returned with a note—"Return. Addressee unknown"—that people became seriously worried. Other letters were neither returned nor ever answered.

I remember a day in early June, when a woman in our neighbourhood came to me with a crumpled postcard in her hand. It was addressed to Kozielsk. Stained with the dirty finger marks of postal officials it had some illegible note scribbled on it, and was stamped with the word "return."

"I'm so worried," she began; "the last letter I received from my husband was at the end of March. It's June now"—here she held out the card in her hand—"I wonder—what do you think could have happened? Whatever is the matter with them? Because mine is not the only case. I know for certain that others have also received no answers lately . . ."

I turned the postcard over in my hand. I saw the first words written on it in a large, clumsy handwriting—"My dearest Wladeczek" . . . There was an ink blot at the bottom of the card. The woman, who had been watching my eyes, hastened to explain.

"Oh—that is where Stas wanted to add his signature for his father, but he failed . . . Oh—what *is* the matter with him? I mean, with that Daddy of Stas?" She

smiled shyly as if afraid she did not make herself clear enough.

"There's no need to worry yet," I murmured. "Haven't we had plenty of proof of the disorder in Russia? The enormous spaces . . . Transport difficulties . . . Maybe they were sent somewhere much further away. It might be months before news can reach us."

Yes. That is just how we also fell under the spell of those distances, that space, as so many do who imagine that one can wander through the Soviet Union like a fish in the sea or a beast in the jungle. One day they are bound to reappear suddenly . . . How true is the proverb that "hope is the mother of fools," and what a foolish hope we cherished—that nothing evil could happen to our prisoners. After all, the Soviet Union was not in a state of war with Poland, she never had declared war on us. They were not prisoners, they were only internees! And even if somebody did not recognize the international conventions, it was not possible to go beyond a certain limit in the international moral code. Perhaps our men were not in the best of conditions but they must surely be alive, even if all trace of them was temporarily lost . . .

We were swayed from anxiety to hope and then back again, and still we waited. But once the correspondence ceased in April-May, 1940, no answer ever came from any one of the prisoners in those three camps.

The anxiety which had already become so widespread in Poland soon infected those who had been separated from the rest of their camp-mates and were assembled at Giazowiec. They were still allowed to correspond with their families, and this is what Major Czapski wrote about it, in his book which has already been quoted in the previous chapter:

Soon we began to worry about the fates of our

former camp-mates, as each postcard we received from Poland contained anxious enquiries concerning the fate of other prisoners who had been in Starobielsk, Kozielsk, and Ostashkov.

Judging by these postcards, we reached the conclusion that we were the only prisoners from the three camps about whom news was reaching Poland.

Towards the end of 1939, the Soviet authorities deported to Kazakstan, together with many thousand others, a Polish woman, Alexandra Urbanska. Her husband, Lieutenant Ryszard Urbanski, a school teacher in civil life, was a prisoner in Kozielsk camp. His wife found herself in Rodnikovka in the Aktiubinska Oblast (District). From there she corresponded regularly with her husband in Kozielsk. From March, 1940, all correspondence with him was broken off. The exasperated wife intervened twice with the local authorities. She was told that these matters were dealt with by the NKVD. So she wrote a petition in which she asked for an explanation as to her husband's whereabouts. That petition wandered for a long time from one office to another until it reached the . . . Smolensk NKVD.

It was returned in the end with the annotation of an NKVD functionary in Smolensk who wrote :

Please inform the petitioner that her husband was transferred to an unknown camp on the sixth of May, 1940.<sup>1</sup>

I saw that document myself. I have every right to believe that it is now in the hands of the Allied authorities together with many others of a similar kind.

A Polish soldier abroad, who does not wish to disclose his name, related the following story.

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<sup>1</sup> Lieut. Ryszard Urbanski, school teacher, was found in Katyn, Smolensk, and his body is described in the collection of German documents, catalogue No. 3,220.

My father, a senior constable of the Polish Police Force in Zdolbunow, had been arrested by the Soviet authorities and sent to the camp in Ostashkov. He used to write letters from there, very regularly.

On the 13th of April 1940, I was deported together with my mother and sister from Zdolbunow to Kazakstan. When we were arrived there we tried to establish contact with my father but we failed. No answer ever came to our letters. Worried about it, we asked the local authorities, then the Central, the NKVD, and the Prosecutor's office. I even wrote a petition to Stalin himself. We received no answer. After I had given up all hope, suddenly in the spring of 1941, a letter arrived from the District Prosecutor's office in Ostashkov. It read :

" The camp in which your father was interned was disbanded in the spring of 1940. The present whereabouts of your father are unknown."

## V

### CONFIRMATION OF THE DREADFUL SURMISE

THE summer months of 1940 passed quickly. The attention of the whole world was so absorbed by war events that no one would have had time to give thought to the fate of 15,000 Polish officers even if the news of their disappearance from the prison files of the Soviet Union had been brought to public knowledge in the Democratic countries. Who vanished? Oh, those men . . . Don't bother . . . They will surely be found, sooner or later. Fifteen thousand men in the uniforms of another country, interned on the territory of an alien state, registered, fed, allowed to correspond with their families, cannot suddenly disappear from the earth's surface! That surely would be the answer of the war experts in the West if they had been asked for their opinion. Especially as they had plenty to worry about then in other matters. The war was not proceeding favourably for the Allies at that time.

But even amongst those directly concerned, nobody knew as yet what had happened to the missing men. Neither their comrades assembled in a new camp, nor their families in Poland, still less the Polish Government abroad. No trace, no news, not even a hint which would point towards some clue to their mysterious disappearance had yet been found.

And then, all of a sudden, from the highest Soviet authorities—and therefore from the most unexpected direction—something happened which not only threw light upon the problem, but in its way confirmed the

worst surmise which until then had been rejected. To explain what happened, it is necessary to return to September 1939.

When the Red Army marched into Poland in aid of the Germans, it occupied all Eastern Poland, including the town of Wilno. In Wilno, as in all other cities, posters were pasted up which called all Polish officers, whether on active service or in the reserve, to register voluntarily with the Soviet authorities. At this time, a Polish Colonel named Berling happened to be in Wilno. Although his name was to become famous later on for other reasons, in 1939 he was just an officer who held a minor post in the Polish Army. He was never an outstanding man although he was very . . . ambitious. Besides, he had good reason to bear a grudge for the past. Shortly before the war, he was summoned before a Military Court of Honour, accused of being involved in a highly unpleasant affair. He was found guilty of despicable conduct towards his own wife, quite incompatible with the status and dignity of an officer. The case was the more serious as the whole affair became public and could not be restricted to the four walls of his home. The verdict condemned him, and he loudly expressed his dissatisfaction with the "prevailing customs in the Officers' Corps."

His presence in Wilno at the outbreak of war was quite accidental. He did not take part in the campaign against the Germans. Later on, when he read the Soviet posters plastered on the walls of the city, he dutifully reported to the authorities. Instead of being granted permission to return home, he was promptly arrested and, together with so many other Polish officers, deported to the interior of Russia.

Even today it is not quite clear for what reasons the Soviet Government separated the "special groups" from other prisoners of the three camps. What was the object of forming that "nursery" of a few hundred

officers who were assembled in Griazoviec camp? The only guess which can be made is, that as a result of confidential talks and observation by the Soviet agents who watched the total mass of the Polish prisoners (treated as counter-revolutionary material), they made a choice—apparently rather unfortunate from their point of view—of those who were selected to form a cadre submissive to future Soviet plans for Poland. And what were the plans for Poland? The initial talks with the “chosen” were rather vague. But as time went on, they became more and more clear, although only in talks held with a few “chosen from among the chosen.”

Intensive Communist propaganda was started in Griazoviec and its results, especially the comments it caused among the prisoners, were closely watched. Finally, as a result of the watchfulness, special confidence was given to three colonels, Berling, Bukojemski and Gorczynski, and a dozen other officers. If we take the total figure of the imprisoned Poles as 15,000, the fifteen selected seems to be rather a meagre result for all that propaganda.

The political talks with these officers were at first quite innocent. They scarcely differed from the general pattern of denigrating the former Polish State, diminishing its importance in Europe, and explaining the backwardness of the “Polish anti-social system” with a simultaneous hymn of praise for the epoch-making achievements in the fields of prosperity, freedom and other wonders of the Bolshevik world. It may be easily guessed that persuasion by means of comparison made rather slow progress even with the most opportunist characters. But in time, these political chats were to change into more concrete and serious talks.

On the 27th of September, 1940, Hitler signed a new pact with Italy and Japan. On the 7th of October, 1940, German troops entered Rumania.

The situation showed signs of tension with even the hitherto closest ally of Germany—Soviet Russia. Hitler ceased to co-ordinate his decisions with Moscow, and Herr von Ribbentrop ceased to consult with Mr. Molotov. The political constellation began to change with an unpleasant possibility looming on the horizon, that Soviet Russia would be degraded from the rôle of an equal partner to that of a victim at the mercy of a victorious Germany. On the other hand, in view of the incessant and painstaking endeavours of Great Britain, Russia still retained the possibility of making a complete swing of the pendulum. In the remote distance, the shape of armed conflict with the German Reich threatened Soviet political plans. Moscow wished to avoid it and preferred to live in peace with Hitler, but would Hitler comply with such a wish?

Between Germany and Russia lies Poland. If it came to a conflict, Poland could become a very important asset to whichever side could gain her for its cause. The Polish soldiers and officers are good fighters, they must be reckoned with. For this and other reasons—parallel to the formation of political groups in Moscow and Lwow, mainly composed of Polish Communists submissive to the Komintern who would later assume the name of “The Union of Polish Patriots”—the idea was born of forming a Polish Military organisation under Soviet control.

This, it must be remembered, was in the year 1940. The Soviet Union still felt too weak and wished to avoid conflict with Hitler at all costs. If, therefore, an idea of forming Polish military units did hover in the minds of the Soviet leaders, it was still only on a theoretical basis, planned for a distant future. But they wanted to be ready for any happening. And that planned readiness of Moscow's attitude towards Poland was expressed for the first time by Mr. Molotov in his speech on 31st of October, 1939, and also pursued with



such consequences in the future.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that Moscow in 1940 already took into consideration the possibility of a conflict with Germany, and, in the event of its ending successfully, had no intention of returning to their own sovereignty the countries she had occupied. Not in the treaty of Yalta in 1944, but four years earlier, in the autumn of 1940, it had already been decided in Moscow that Poland in the future would become only a dependent satellite of the Soviet Union. To that aim were directed the aforementioned political talks with the "chosen" group of Polish officers.

"That so-called 'London Government' of yours is surely only a vaudeville farce!"

For the time being, Colonel Berling who understood the importance of the bargain showed great restraint. On the 10th of October 1940 this group was transferred from Giazoviec to the Butyrka prison in Moscow. But the prisoners were treated most courteously, considering the customary Soviet methods, and they were granted all possible privileges. Furthermore, their food became exceptionally abundant. On the 13th of the same month they were transferred once more to a well-lighted pleasant cell in the Lubianka Prison, and it is there that the talks were resumed. The possible conflict between Germany and the Soviet Union and its consequences, were mentioned for the first time during these talks. The problem of the Polish civilian population deported to Russia and the other problem of the prisoners of war were also discussed. And the Russian thesis about the eventual future of Poland—a very

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<sup>1</sup> In this speech, Molotov said, amongst other things: "One thunderstroke administered first by the German Army and followed by a similar blow from the Red Army, was enough to annihilate that miserable product of the Treaty of Versailles which was the Poland built on oppression of her minorities. The whole world realizes that there can be no possible talk of a revival of that old Poland . . ."

different Poland to the former state—now became quite clear . . .

Just about that time an important change took place which in effect led to an even greater strengthening of the most efficient implement of the Soviet power and the Soviet terror. It was the creation of the NKGB as a supplement to the NKVD.

One of the most famous offspring of the Bolshevik Revolution, was the so-called *Cheka* or the *Cheresvichayna*. (*Cheresvichayna Komissya do borby s kontrrevolyuciej*, Extraordinary Commission for combating counter-revolution.) The Cheka drowned Russia in an ocean of blood and took a toll of millions of victims. A few years after the civil war, it was transformed into the GPU (*Glavnoye Politicheskoye Upravlenye*, Central Political Department) which can be looked upon as the Russian equivalent of the German Gestapo. The bad fame this new institution soon acquired, both in the Soviet Union and abroad, and the frictions which became apparent in the organisation itself, led to the changing of the sign-board once again, this time into the NKVD (*Narodnyj Komissariat Vnutryennyh Del*, People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs). The NKVD in no way differed from the GPU just as the GPU in no way differed from the Cheka. But after the year 1939, as a result of the Second World War and the gaining of new territories by the Soviet Union (in June 1940, the Soviet Union attacked one by one the Baltic States and incorporated them into the USSR), the necessity arose of increasing the terror already existing. The NKVD was therefore strengthened by the creation of a highly developed new body of Security Police called the NKGB (*Narodnyj Komissariat Gosudarstvennoy Bezopastnosti*, National Commissariat of Public Security). In 1940, at the head of the NKVD, stood Commissar Beria, at the head of the new NKGB—Commissar Merkulov. These two held in their hands the executive power in the USSR,

and enforced the directives issued by Stalin in close collaboration with Molotov.

On the 30th of October, 1940, Beria and Merkulov appeared in person at the Lubianka Prison and interviewed the three Polish colonels detained there, Berling, Bukojemski and Gorczynski. The Soviet Commissars spoke of a possible future conflict with Germany, they drew a picture of a future Poland (very similar to the one brought to life in 1945) and they raised the question of organizing Polish military units under Soviet command.

In principle Berling agreed with such a conception. The conversation then turned to more concrete problems. Merkulov raised the question of the possible number of officers who could be considered suitable for these future Polish detachments. At this moment, Beria's face twitched, but it was too late. Berling, who, of course, knew nothing of the disappearance of the prisoners from the three camps, immediately offered to prepare a list of names himself, of those whom he remembered to be imprisoned on Soviet territory.

Merkulov remained silent. It was Beria who, after having awkwardly cleared his throat, uttered the following extremely important words: "No, not those. We made a big mistake concerning them. A grave mistake was made . . ." (*"My zdielali oshibkou, bolshouiu oshibkou zdielali."*)

This conversation took place in the spacious study of the prison commander. After returning to the cell, Berling told all details of the talk to the officers who had not taken part in the interview. Naturally this statement made by Beria came as a revelation to them all. A deathly silence followed. Colonel Gorczynski murmured that these most important words should somehow be recorded, even if only in the memory of the witnesses. They could mean nothing else except that something had happened to these officers.

But what?

Nobody uttered a sound. Only after a while, someone asked: "What precisely were his actual words?"

"As I remember," began Gorczynski, "I think he said: 'You may prepare the lists, but not many of them are left . . . We made a great mistake concerning them . . . ' And after a while: 'We returned them to the Germans . . . ' Or words to that effect."

"How could you possibly not grasp such a statement correctly?"

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It is obvious that the Soviet Government never extradited any Polish prisoners to the Germans. Nobody ever saw them, either in Germany or on their way through Poland. No such extradition took place at any of the frontier points. No document ever existed which recorded such an event. The German authorities never acknowledged having received such prisoners, and the Soviet Government itself will never support such a version in any of its official statements, but on the contrary will state that no such thing ever happened.

The statement made by Beria must therefore be treated either as an impromptu excuse to counterbalance the unpleasant impression which his previous words had made on his listeners, or else it was an official excuse prepared by the Soviet authorities, so that in the event of war breaking out with Germany and the question of the missing Polish prisoners being raised, they might throw the responsibility for their disappearance on to the Germans. But probably at that time the problem was not considered urgent. Not having been precisely formulated it could not be mentioned by Beria otherwise than in the form of a vague hint.

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The next day, 31st October, the fifteen privileged Polish officers with Berling at their head, were transported

from the Lubianka Prison to a place called Malachovka, some twenty-five miles from Moscow. There, in a villa isolated from the outer world, and under the supervision of NKVD agents, they lived under conditions so different from those obtaining normally in Russia, and so remote from what they had gone through in the camps and prisons, that they themselves called that villa "the house of bliss." Millions of Soviet citizens would envy them the life they were given there.

In Malachovka, they underwent specially organized "political courses." They were supplied with books and facilities for study and research work—but only in one special direction—to mould their outlook upon Communist principles.

The story of that "house of bliss" is an epic of hope and treachery, of desperate reaction and breakdown, of hysteria and the struggle against conscience, against the others there and the blank wall which surrounded the house. It may be asserted that from among the fifteen only Berling, the leader, did not fail the hopes which the Soviet authorities had attached to them. In consequence and without illusion, he repudiated his soldier's oath and his country, to enter the service of a foreign State. Had he no nightmares which haunted him in his sleep, whispering into his ear; "A grave error was made concerning them . . . "?

What error? What sort of error? Who made the error?

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When at last war broke out between Germany and Russia, and a treaty was signed between the Soviet Union and the Polish Government in London, it seemed that the Russians had renounced their idea of a Communist Poland. Berling and Co. were returned to the genuine Polish Army newly formed on Soviet territory. But Berling soon deserted from his official post in

Krasnowadzk, and once again offered his services to the Communists. In a personal order, issued by the Headquarters of the Polish Army in the East, he was crossed off the list of Polish officers. In 1943, however, he was promoted to the rank of General but by . . . Stalin. He was appointed Commander of the "Polish" units which were formed, not by the Polish but by the Soviet authorities. He had become a pliable implement in their hands. He made a career. His name was advertised because the Soviet Government was anxious to find a counterbalance to the free Polish Government and the free Polish Army in the West. The year 1944 was the peak year of his career. Later on, less and less was heard about him until his name faded into oblivion. What happened finally to Berling?

Perhaps if it were not for the fact that he had repeated and made known the fatal words of Commissar Beria, he would have continued in his brilliant career. But it had become too well known. It had found its way into the press and was quoted in many Polish publications. There are witnesses who heard Berling repeat the words of the Soviet Commissar. There are reports and documents signed by such witnesses.

Or perhaps much later, those nightmares began to haunt him?

No one knows, and whatever happened to him, it no longer had any bearing on the development of events with which this book is concerned.

## VI

JUNE, 1941

AT DAWN, on the 22nd of June, 1941, all along the line which divided the occupation zones in Eastern Europe between Germany and Russia, countless heavy guns opened fire. Without any warning, Hitler had assaulted the USSR. The Soviet Union, although feverishly trying to complete its armament, was not yet ready to resist such an assault. The blow of the German armoured fist was so powerful that the Red Army literally went to pieces under the shock. The first frontier defeats turned into a major disaster. The Germans surrounded whole armies. The number of prisoners taken swelled to unbelievable proportions. Town after town was captured, defence lines were broken through, whole provinces fell to the enemy, and with them factories, mines, stores of food and countless raw materials.

The military defeat of the Soviet Union, the slowness of its organization, the inefficiency of its command, the stoppage of transport, the cutting of all communications and the annihilation were on a scale unprecedented in the history of war.

All these events belonged to a different sphere of interest and would scarcely touch upon this story, if it were not for certain happenings directly connected with the retreat of the Red Army. What is so significant is the Soviet treatment of all prisoners on those territories evacuated before the advancing Germans. A striking thing happened. In the face of a complete disintegration and collapse, at a time when whole armies

fell into the hands of the enemy or dispersed to seek cover in the forests, when the authorities were leaving behind them enormous stores of food and raw materials, when they were even unable to keep pace with the evacuation of the archives and left behind all official acts and documents—they somehow managed to find the time and means to organize with great thoroughness the evacuation of their crowded prisons. What forced them to do that? A pathological complex of terror or simply the fact that the only efficient organization on Soviet territory was the NKVD and the associated NKGB? The answer is difficult to make. Anyhow, it was obvious that the decision was taken not to let a single convict fall into the hands of the Germans. All prisons, all concentration camps, all forced labour camps were evacuated. And wherever the swift advance of the Germans made evacuation impossible, mass executions of the convicts took place, which became the most revolting massacres.

It was a rule without exception, and as such it contradicts in a most forceful way the future Soviet version of the alleged abandonment of the Polish prisoner-of-war camps in the neighbourhood of Smolensk. That is why the following stories, although apparently having little connection with the question of the Katyn murders, have a direct bearing and are closely bound up with the solution of the mystery.

The same fate overcame all in the prisons and camps, whether on the vast territories occupied by the USSR ranging from Estonia to Bessarabia, or on actual Soviet territory. A great proportion of the prisoners who survived that blood-chilling evacuation and later managed to escape from the Soviet Union, gave detailed reports of what they had lived through. These stories may vary as to circumstances, but they are unanimous when referring to the methods of dealing with the prisoners. The reports submitted by Polish citizens who survived imprisonment and the Soviet occupation form



an enormous dossier which is kept in safety by Polish authorities abroad.

Among other reports and descriptions, one in particular is worth quoting. It is by Lt.-Col. Prawdzic-Slaski and it can serve as a typical example of Soviet methods at that time.

### THE ROAD OF DEATH

I was arrested on the 21st February, 1941, in Grodno and deported to Minsk. After long enquiries and endless interrogations I was next sent to Moscow, and finally placed as a political convict in a special NKVD prison back in Minsk.

From the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Russia, Minsk became a constant target for the German air force. The whole town was in flames. Food and water became short.

On the evening of the 24th of June I heard sounds of prisoners in the other cells being murdered. You could hear very distinctly the opening of the cells, then scuffling sounds, moans and occasionally a shot. Later on, someone said that the prisoners were being forced to drink poison. How many were murdered that way I could not say. The sound of footsteps, the banging of the doors and the groans became louder and louder as they were nearing my cell . . .

At the very last moment, one of the strongest German air raids on Minsk began. The executions of the prisoners were postponed. After the air raid ceased, all the cells were opened and we were told to go into the prison yard. We were then surrounded by a strong guard and driven at a running pace out of the burning town. Our group numbered about two hundred persons. Some three miles beyond the town they gave us a rest in a forest. As well as all of us, prisoners from the other prisons in Minsk were as-

sembled there. The total amounted to some 20,000 persons. The group to which I belonged was set aside and treated as the most dangerous. Amongst us were seven Soviet airmen who were led with their hands tied behind them with wire. They had been arrested at the last moment, suspected of acting as spies for the enemy.

I decided that it was a bad thing to belong to that group. I confided my doubts to a few of my closer colleagues, and one by one we managed to sneak away and mix with the other groups already assembled there before us. My decision proved to be sound. As we were marched out of the little forest, the group from which we had fled was executed on the spot. We were driven along a road leading east, and on the way we were again divided into various groups.

Afraid to be recognized, some of us tried to disguise our appearance. I changed my garment with another prisoner, taking a suit which looked much worse. Someone from the criminal department had succeeded in concealing a few Gillette razors and my friends managed to shave off my moustache and beard. The group we were in now numbered about 3,000. It included people of all ages ranging from very old men to children of both sexes. Walking beside me was a little girl of about twelve. I asked her what she was arrested for. She looked up at me with astonishment and answered in a very serious tone: "For counter-revolution and espionage!" She came from Poland, somewhere in the neighbourhood of Nieswiez.

We were driven on at a killing pace. Those who could not keep up, no matter whether they were children, old men or women, were murdered on the road. In that nightmare, miracles happened however. A certain old lady, Mrs. Borkowska from Lida, fell down exhausted. An NKVD guard came

up to her and, kicking her, said: "Waste of a bullet for you. You'll rot anyhow!"

Apparently she did not. The old lady survived and when I returned to the country in 1942, I met her, in perfect health, at Lida.

With another friend I helped along the road old Judge Gedroyc, the President of the Court of Appeal from Luck, who suffered from acute asthma. Seeing that he was endangering our lives because of the incessant lagging behind, he begged us to leave him alone. It was plain that his strength was swiftly ebbing away, and he could not pull through much longer, and as we had not enough strength to go on carrying him, we were forced to abandon him. We saw them shoot him. The column was fast melting. It became more and more difficult to keep up the pace.

All the time, NKVD functionaries walked up and down the dragging column, and when they recognized anyone they would take him aside and murder him. The pauses were short. They gave us no food, and thirst nearly killed us. The heat was simply unbearable. During that march, they suddenly spotted a close friend of mine, a colleague from the Polish Underground Movement and a former chairman of the Students' Mutual Help Society in Warsaw. His pseudonym was "Oscar." We saw how they dragged him aside and fired three shots at him. After the first shot, the wretched man leapt up with outstretched hands and fell backwards into the bushes. The NKVD man fired twice again at the prostrate body and then walked off without taking any further notice of his victim. We were all sure that he was dead. To my utmost stupefaction, I met him, sound and active, after I returned to Poland. Apparently the first shot had crushed his lower jaw. The other two careless shots completely missed him.

They drove us thus till we reached a town called

Ihumen. They squeezed us all into a prison courtyard there, already filled with other prisoners. About 2,000 from our group reached Ihumen, the others having fallen by the way. From among my own friends who lost their lives on that road were Kazimierz Gumowski and Alexander Polanko, as well as many others. That awful road had been named by the local population—"The Road of Death."

After three days of starving in the courtyard of the Ihumen prison, we received about four ounces of bread per head. While we were resting, NKVD agents came again and started calling out names. Amongst others, my name was also shouted. Two fools gave themselves up. They were immediately taken to the shower-bath room and murdered. On the evening of that day, German aeroplanes raided that town. After the raid, we were divided into new groups according to our alleged sentences. One group was driven out to the left, the other to the right. Together with a few of my acquaintances, I was joined to the left group. There were about 700 of us. We were led out of the prison at night, under a strong guard, and driven on further eastwards. After about three or four miles, we entered a forest. We heard shots at the end of the column. Apparently the guards had opened fire upon its rear. They grabbed the prisoners one by one by their collars and after shooting them, threw them into the ditch along the road. We all quickened our pace. Upon which the NKVD guards marching alongside us, also started firing at us.

We all fell down. Just then some lorries full of Red Army soldiers drove past in their flight before the Germans. Hearing the shots before them, they took them for a German diversion behind the front line, and they also opened fire on us, and on our guards. The misunderstanding lasted some time before it

was cleared up. Our NKVD escort let the army cars pass, which literally drove over the prisoners stretched out on the road. When they had passed the guards started to shout : " Run to the woods or we shall shoot !"

I was lying by the side of the road close to Witold Daszkiewicz from Lida, whom I held by the hand. When he wanted to raise himself up after the warning of the guards I held him to the ground. But the majority did jump to their feet, upon which the escort opened a murderous machine-gun fire and also started throwing hand grenades at us. The roar of the shots and explosions deafened the shouts and the moans of the wounded and dying. We wriggled into the adjoining ditch and waited till the fire slackened. We then crept out of the ditch and made a dash for the thicket.

That is how we succeeded in escaping from the hands of our oppressors. It was the night of the 27th-28th of June. After running for about a mile, we paused to draw breath at the edge of a clearing. Very soon other survivors of the massacre began to join us. About thirty-seven of us gathered in that clearing.

The other group from Ihumen, the one which was driven to the right, after being surrounded in a clearing, were all shot down by machine-gun fire. To make sure that no one was left alive, lorries were brought up which drove to and fro over the prostrate bodies. From that group, only one man survived, who, badly wounded, was taken to hospital by the Germans, and later on returned home.

The third group, which remained in the prison courtyard, was saved by the local population after the NKVD guards had fled before the approaching Germans. One of the groups which never reached Ihumen was massacred on the way. From that group,

eleven criminal prisoners were picked out, to whom the NKVD commander made a speech :

“ Stalin acquits you, and returns you to life, ordering you to defend your country !”

One of those who succeeded in persuading his oppressors that he was a criminal, was Lieut. Sankowski, who later on was sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Langwasser by the Germans. He wrote his memoirs. I do not know what happened to the remaining groups which left Minsk.

After three days of wandering through forests and marshes, we decided to approach a village in order to gather information and acquire food. Fortunately we were in “ no man’s land.” Later on German patrols picked us up and sent us to a camp in Minsk.

The author of this story mentioned that the local population had called the road he had passed along— “ The Road of Death.” A name just as commonplace as it was true. A similar road had been made by tens of thousands of other convicts. No one was spared, and no one was meant to survive.

Today, the public opinion of the whole world, fed by endless descriptions of mass murders and concentration camps from Germany, does not know, or does not want to know, about the deeds committed by the Bolsheviks at the time of their retreat in 1941. All along the border there were numerous prisons. When, after the retreat of the Red Army, the gates of these prisons were thrown open, piles of dead bodies were found in them.

According to the story of an eyewitness from Waskowicze, a village in the county of Dzisna, in the district of Wilno, whose statement had been taken down in writing and is kept in the archives of the Polish Army, under the catalogue number 15741:

In 1941, when the Bolsheviks retreated before the Germans, they tried to lay hands on and murder all the priests in their parishes. Our priest managed to escape from the little town and hid in one of the villages. In the parish of Jazno the Bolsheviks succeeded in capturing the priest . . .

Under No. 15744, there is the statement of an inhabitant of Wiszen in the county of Wilejka :

. . . When, after the escape of the Bolsheviks, the prison gates of the Wilejka gaol were opened, a most awful sight of mutilated prisoners presented itself to the awe-stricken eyes of the local people. In one cell a man was found hanged with barbed wire stuck through his jaws ; in another cell they found bodies of a few men and women stripped naked and with their ears cut off and their eyes poked out. In the garden adjoining the prison, freshly dug soil was discovered. After digging it up, hundreds of bodies were found. They were all victims of murders committed by the NKVD.

Far better known was the murder committed in Berezwecz in the district of Wilno, where a large prison existed. Most of the prisoners came from the local peasantry, accused of a "negative" attitude towards the Soviet authorities. When war broke out, there was no time to evacuate them and they were all murdered. A few hours after the Germans entered, the gates of the prison were forced open and 4,000 bodies were found.

Very characteristic was the mass murder of the inmates of a Soviet concentration camp in Provieniszki. According to information received, documents and the statements of the only two survivors, this is what happened.

Provieniszki lies on former Lithuanian territory

During the Soviet occupation of 1940-1941, after the creation of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic, a concentration camp was set up there, meant for both political and criminal offenders. When the Russo-German war broke out, some of the prisoners were sent away. About 500 remained in the hands of a Lithuanian bodyguard organized by the Bolsheviks. The moment that everybody thought the Red Army had already withdrawn from the neighbourhood, the Lithuanian Militia tore down the Red banner and hoisted one with the Lithuanian national colours. After some time a detachment of armoured tanks approached the camp and the camp guards mistook them for German ones. They turned out to be Soviet tanks . . .

The Bolsheviks surrounded the camp, first murdered the Lithuanian guards accused of treason, after which they ordered all the prisoners to assemble in the yard. When that was done, the tanks drove into the crowd, firing all their machine-guns. The panic-stricken prisoners, seeing themselves surrounded, swayed up and down and clustered into an ever denser throng with everyone vainly seeking protection behind the bodies of others, whether dead or alive. In a little while, the five hundred lay in heaps on the ground like a swathed cornfield. Red Army soldiers with their bayonets finished off those who still gave signs of life. From the total, only two survived. One, wounded, whom they must somehow have overlooked, and the second one untouched, who, after falling down, had smeared his head with the blood and brains of a body at his side, and then remained quite still, pretending to be dead. These two were able to tell the awful story of the massacre.

But the best known of all these mass murders committed in Poland by the Soviet authorities is the massacre in the Lwow prisons on the eve of the capture of the city by the Germans. German propaganda made ample



use of these facts, filling its press with detailed narratives and photographs, and even invited foreign correspondents to inspect the scene of these dreadful crimes. In Lwow, over twelve hundred prisoners were murdered from amongst those who could not be evacuated to Russia in time.

The Polish side has not yet gathered all the available documents in the matter. The only published work is a pamphlet written by Prof. W. Studnicki entitled: *The Rule of Soviet Russia in Eastern Poland*. The author went to Lwow himself, during the German occupation, in order to gather material and evidence. On page 45 of his booklet he writes :

On the eve of the withdrawal of the Soviet authorities and of the Red Army's retreat from Lwow under pressure from the advancing Germans, the shooting began. The first victims to fall were those whom the Bolsheviks thought too dangerous to be left behind. The execution took place in the following manner. Each prisoner was called by name. He was then led towards the basement and shot from behind, in the neck. In that way, 600 Ukrainians, 400 Poles, and 220 Jews were murdered.

As already mentioned, similar massacres were committed all over the enormous space stretching from the Gulf of Finland to the Black Sea. A little later a mass grave, probably the largest of all, was discovered in the town of Winnica in the Ukraine. There the Bolsheviks had murdered all the Ukrainians who were imprisoned for sympathizing with the national Ukrainian movement which aimed at forming a free and independent Ukraine.

When the fury of war brought about all these bloody deeds and the world seemed to be rocking on its foundations, it would be expected that the fate of the 15,000

Polish soldiers who had vanished so mysteriously a year and a half before, after being interned on Soviet territory, would be forgotten and fade in importance. But it so happened that this new outbreak, followed by the Soviet disaster, and a new grouping in international affairs, brought to the surface the answer to the mystery of this great war crime, in the same way in which a gale-swept sea often wrenches from the bottom some long forgotten object and sweeps it to the shore, right to the very feet of astonished seamen.

VII  
THE VAIN SEARCH

WITH every week of the campaign, the Soviet defeat increased in dimension. The sudden change of the political situation had landed the Soviet Union in the Allied War camp, and as a partner pleading desperately for help. In fact, that help was generously granted by Churchill. In July, 1941, the Russians, staggering at the very edge of a precipice, were willing to give any concession and sign any agreement provided it helped them in stopping the victorious march of the German armies. Under these circumstances a reconciliation became possible between the Polish Government in London and the Soviet Union. An agreement was reached.

There were many causes for such a reconciliation. First of all, both had a common foe—Germany. Although—was not Russia just as great an enemy of Poland, and even, in some aspects, a greater one? Undoubtedly yes. But the Polish Government decided to wipe out the immediate past and forget Russia's treacherous assault. Firstly, it was urged to take such a step by Great Britain, and secondly, such a policy was in accordance with the political theories of General Sikorski, the Polish Commander-in-Chief and Prime Minister, who had always stood for Russo-Polish collaboration. Thirdly, Poland had much to gain by such an agreement, as she would recover all the prisoners of war and the enormous masses of Polish civilians deported to Russia, whose number had been roughly estimated at a million and a half. Besides, the Polish Government in London did not know that 15,000 Polish prisoners of war, including

9,000 officers, had vanished and never would be found alive.

Because as yet—who does really know anything about them? Except for those Soviet authorities responsible for their management, no one can know anything for certain.

The families in Poland who had suddenly ceased to receive letters, could scarcely guess, and even if they did, they refused to believe, and recoiled from accepting such an awful possibility . . . The group of prisoners in Giazoviec only knew as much as they could learn from letters received from home. As for Colonel Berling and his little group, they undoubtedly mused over the sinister words uttered by Commissar Beria, but . . .

But . . . The Polish Government had a difficult and indirect contact with the families worrying at home. It had no contact with the prisoners' camp at Giazoviec, still less with Berling and his group surrounded by a high wall in their "house of bliss" in Malachovka.

When signing the pact with Soviet Russia, the Polish Government, therefore, asked for no more than a return to the "status quo" before September, 1939, and in good faith stipulated the release of all Polish prisoners of war and civilian deportees. The above requests were made clear in :

(1) A Note from the Polish Ministry for Foreign Affairs, which was handed to the Right Hon. Anthony Eden, British Foreign Secretary, on the 8th of July, 1941.

(2) A draft project of the proposed agreement with Russia made known on the 12th July, 1941.

Finally on the 30th of July, 1941, a Polish-Russian Agreement was signed with the inclusion of the following additional Protocol :

(1) As soon as diplomatic relations are re-established, the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist

Republics will grant amnesty to all Polish citizens who are at present deprived of their freedom on the territory of the USSR, either as prisoners of war or on other adequate grounds.

(2) The present Protocol comes into force simultaneously with the Agreement of July the 30th, 1941.

On the 14th of August, 1941 a military agreement was also signed between Poland and Russia, and from then on, released Polish prisoners of war began to pour into the Polish Headquarters established on Soviet territory.<sup>1</sup> This was joined by an overland trek of thousands of civilians deported to Russia after the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939.

But very soon the Polish Command in the USSR realized that a great number of well-known officers were still missing. It was known with absolute certainty that these had been taken prisoner by the Russians. For example, officers from General Anders' army group, with his Chief of Staff, Major Soltan, in particular, had not reported. Neither did Major Fuhrman, for many years the A.D.C. of General Sikorski, nor many of the Colonels, or even some Generals. After some time, it also became evident that many officers of lower rank had failed to report. As time went on, it became apparent that there were far fewer prisoners reporting than those known to be missing. Amazed by this discovery, the Polish authorities first turned to the Soviet liaison officers. The answers they got were evasive, and hints were made that many of the prisoners had been released to go home as early as 1940.

But the Polish authorities had already established contact with the released group of prisoners from Gria-

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<sup>1</sup> Mostly those who were first interned by Lithuania and Latvia and who fell into the hands of the Soviet authorities after Russia had incorporated both these countries in the USSR.

zowiec. From them, they learned that the missing officers were not in Poland, because they had received anxious letters from the worried families at home, enquiring about their fate. The explanation given by the Soviet liaison officers could not therefore be true. The whole matter was kept secret for the time being, and instructions were issued to the Underground authorities in the German Occupation to check up on this version. Perhaps the Germans had placed them in camps? Simultaneously, a special department was created at the Polish Headquarters in the USSR, with the object of preparing lists of the missing prisoners.

It must be stressed here, that in spite of so many dubious facts, during the first period of contact with the Soviet authorities, Polish representatives never questioned the good will of the Soviet Government. Nobody even dreamt that it was possible to get rid of so many officers and soldiers by the simple means of . . . murdering them. It was generally assumed that the release of the prisoners was hindered by the unscrupulousness of local officials, and also that the Soviet Union was struggling with tremendous transport difficulties caused by the fury and intensity of the war.

At that time, Professor Kot was sent as Polish Ambassador to Moscow. He was well known as a fervent adherent to the idea of Polish-Soviet friendship. It was a curious coincidence that he happened to be entrusted to undertake most of the interventions which, in the end, threw an unequivocal light upon the mystery of Katyn. Curious, because later on he joined the Quisling "Warsaw Government" which took its orders from Moscow, and in 1945 was appointed by this Government, Ambassador in Rome.<sup>1</sup> But in 1941, he still

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<sup>1</sup> Professor Kot was a member of Mikolajczyk's Peasant Party. After the latter's escape from Poland in 1948, he renounced his post of Polish Ambassador in Rome and has remained since as an exile in Western Europe.

acted in good faith, and his conversation and interviews had all been scrupulously taken down in protocols, and today form an important chapter in the archives collected on the Katyn case and other Soviet crimes.

The first of his talks which referred to the problem of the missing prisoners was held with Mr. Vyshinsky, then Deputy Commissar for Foreign Affairs, and it took place on the 20th of September, 1941. Seven days later, on the 27th, Ambassador Kot handed to the Soviet Government a Note which pointed out the following facts.

- (1) The retention of single and even whole groups of Polish citizens in prisons and compulsory labour camps.
- (2) The refusal to allow the retained Poles to establish contact with the Polish Embassy.
- (3) The refusal to grant Polish citizens the right to choose or change their residence.
- (4) The forcing of Polish citizens to further labour on the same conditions as applied to other convicts.
- (5) The refusal to grant amnesty certificates to Poles.

Messrs Kot and Vyshinsky met a second time on the 6th of October, 1941, and on the 13th the Polish Embassy sent a second Note which drew attention to the incomplete fulfilment of the Soviet obligations concerning the release of Polish citizens from camps and prisons.

Two and a half months had already passed since the signing of the Polish-Russian Agreement on the 30th of July, 1941! Where were over eight thousand Polish officers? Where were seven thousand other prisoners? But Mr. Kot did not want to raise any more tension and tried to be patient. General Sikorski was supposed to be about to pay a visit to Russia. So next

day, the 14th of October, Mr. Kot only mentioned the matter casually to Comrade Vyshinsky . . .

"I hope that when General Sikorski arrives, he will find all his officers."

"We will hand over all the men we have," answered Vyshinsky, "but we cannot give what we have not got. The British, for example, gave us the names of their men who were supposed to be in the USSR and they were actually never here."

And Mr. Vyshinsky shrugged his shoulders as if it were for the first time that he had heard that in the very centre of the Soviet Union, where not only human beings but all their deeds and words are carefully registered, there were supposed to be 15,000 Polish officers and other ranks, alive in 1940 and kept in prison camps! They were going to tell *him*—the Chief Prosecutor of the greatest Police-State in the world!

General Sikorski wished to keep up the best possible relations with the Soviet Union. When pursuing that aim he had difficulties with the members of his own Cabinet and with the opinion of his fellow-countrymen who could not forget past grievances. They could not swallow friendship with the cruellest of their enemies. Sikorski treated actual political considerations as more important, and waved away the grumbling, the protests and the gossip about the missing prisoners as vicious instigations and defeatism. He did not believe that they could really have disappeared.

"We shall find them," he maintained. "Gentlemen! You do not pretend that the Soviet Government has simply murdered them? Absurd! Nonsense!"

And in the best faith, he waited for the Underground report from German-occupied Poland. And at last the answer came, a dreadful answer.

Nobody saw any of the officers in question, either free or in any of the German camps. All the families



confirm unanimously that correspondence with them was broken in April-May, 1940, while they were most certainly still in the hands of the Soviet authorities.

Sikorski immediately contacted the Polish Embassy in Moscow. The Embassy still had not picked up the trail. So the Polish Prime Minister, still thinking of friendly negotiations, wrote a personal letter to the Soviet Ambassador in London. It was dated the 15th of October, 1941. He received no answer . . . Therefore he instructed his Embassy in Moscow to insist still more energetically for an answer.

On the 22nd of October, Ambassador Kot went straight to Molotov. On the strength of his former conversations with Vyshinsky, he claimed: "I gave Mr. Vyshinsky a number of examples of Centres which the amnesty order had not reached, and of categories of our citizens, for example, officers, judges, prosecutors, police officers, who had not been released . . ."

When he answered, Mr. Molotov seemed to cough more than he spoke. After all it was autumn, practically winter already in central Russia. It was cold. Many people complained of catching colds. Fuel was scarce—there was a war on . . . Between the coughs and grunts, the following words could be discerned: ". . . but in a number of regions, have no doubt remained in their former place of residence . . . Great administrative and transport difficulties . . . Please believe, Mr. Ambassador, that we are giving . . . all possible help in this matter . . ."

In truth, the Polish authorities were satisfied with the answer. After all Mr. Molotov was not an irresponsible youngster carelessly whistling to the wind. His weight was even greater than—for example—that of Timoshenko or . . . of even Shaposhnikov. No, no, he held far too important a position and he would carry responsibility for every word he said, even if his speech

was indistinct because of an acute cold. It must be taken as confirmation of the optimistic theory that the prisoners had probably been deported to the far north, and just then it was technically impossible to send them back.

In spite of this, the Polish Ambassador handed another Note to Molotov on the 1st November which bore the character of a confidential message. He asked for the settlement of the matter somehow, before the expected arrival of General Sikorski in Moscow. At the same time, Mr. Kot asked for another interview with Mr. Vyshinsky, which took place the next day, the 2nd of November. It was the fourth talk already that they had had on the subject. Mentioning Mr. Molotov's opinion that it was probably only the transport difficulties which hindered the return of the prisoners, the Polish Ambassador asked this time for only one thing.

"Couldn't you at least help us by establishing telegraphic contact with them? In the end, someone must know where they actually are."

Vyshinsky seemed to be in a very bad temper that day.

"Perhaps you know where they are supposed to be?"

Kot mentioned the name of a few alleged camps. Vyshinsky again shrugged his shoulders. After an uneasy silence, the Polish Ambassador continued: "So much time has already passed since the signing of the Agreement, and still so many of our people have not regained the liberty which should be theirs by right. We are not even receiving letters or telegrams from them. In our conversation of the 14th of October, 1941, Mr. Commissar, you promised me, however, that you would let me have the lists I required on the following day."

"I did say so, but on the 15th the departure from Moscow took place and, as a result of this, contacts between the various departments deteriorated. This really caused the delay in obtaining data . . ."

"The Central Office of the NKVD or the GULAG (*Glavnoje Uprawlenje Lagieroj*—The Central Camp Administration Office) has the appropriate data. Please give me facilities for sending delegates who, accompanied by officials of the NKVD, would visit the camps where these people are, to bring them help and give them encouragement to endure the winter."

"Mr. Ambassador, you put the matter as though we wished to hide some Polish citizens from you. Where are they?"

And Vyshinsky slapped his knee. He then turned his head away and looked through the window. Beyond it, the soft snow was falling silently. Vyshinsky offered the Polish Ambassador a cigarette. Mr. Kot, being a non-smoker refused, and after settling himself in his armchair, made this statement.

"I received the data in my possession from eyewitnesses, reports and protocols. People saw how, at one time or the other, many of our officers were deported to an unknown destination. If I obtained exact information from you, I would make use of it. These men are not just one or two who could vanish like . . . like this snow falling now, which will vanish before spring is over . . ."

Finally Vyshinsky answered: "A certain number of persons named in the lists presented by you have already been found, and we are looking for others. When I receive the rest of the names, I shall be able to approach the competent authorities and I shall even be able to punish where necessary. These things are my personal responsibility because I am directly in charge of the Polish questions."

Quite helpless in the face of this perpetual cajolery, elusiveness and beating about the bush by the Soviet partner, the Polish Government asked the British Govern-

ment to mediate. The British intervention took place on the 3rd of November, 1941. On the 8th Mr. Molotov issued a Note which included the following paragraph :

In accordance with a decree issued by the Presiding Board of the Supreme Council of the USSR on August 13th, 1941, which decree granted an amnesty to all Polish citizens who had been deprived of their freedom, either as prisoners of war or for any other adequate reasons, all had been released; furthermore, certain categories of the released prisoners and internees received material help from the Soviet authorities.

And four days later, on the 12th of November, at his fifth talk with the Polish Ambassador, Vyshinsky stated : "I am convinced that these men have already been released. It is only a matter of confirming where they are. If any one of them is not at liberty he will, of course, be set free. For me this problem simply does not exist."

Both Mr. Molotov's Note and this latest statement of Mr. Vyshinsky make it plain enough—all prisoners had been released. Where, then, were the missing Generals, Colonels and thousands of other officers of lower rank ? Where were the members of the Police Force and the Military Police deported and assembled in 1939 at the camp in Ostashkov ?

Rumours circulated that they were somewhere in concentration camps in the far north. But this was denied on the 14th of November, 1941, in a Note which Bogomolov, the Soviet Ambassador to the Polish Government in London, handed to Count Raczynski, the Polish Foreign Minister (and Polish Ambassador in London). It stated :

All the Polish officers on the territory of the USSR

have been set free. Your supposition, Mr. Prime Minister, that a large number of Polish Officers are dispersed throughout the Northern regions of the USSR is obviously based on inaccurate information.

On the same day on which Mr. Bogomolov thus shattered the last illusions of the Polish Government in London of finding the missing prisoners—a hope to which the Polish authorities clung so desperately, trying to persuade themselves and the Soviet authorities that they must be somewhere in the far North—on November the 14th, Ambassador Kot in Moscow succeeded in reaching the Dictator of the Soviet Union in person. Joseph Stalin granted him an interview in the presence of Commissar Molotov. The conversation which took place was recorded in writing immediately after it had ended, in the same way as all the other talks which had taken place previously.

Ambassador Kot addressed Stalin—"Mr. President"—during that interview. He spoke of the many current problems which needed solution in fulfilment of the spirit of the Soviet-Polish Agreement.

During a conversation, Stalin has the habit, especially when listening to someone else speaking, of taking a slip of paper and scribbling on it in pencil, all sorts of figures, drawings and numbers. Nobody really ever had a chance to take a good look at these drawings because, time after time, the ruler of one sixth of the world's surface would suddenly and nervously bedaub everything he had drawn, crumple up the paper and throw it away. He would then take a fresh slip of paper and start all over again. And he persists in doing this throughout the conversations. But he listens closely to every word which is spoken because whatever he says is always to the point . . .

"Mr. President, I have already taken a lot of your most valuable time. But there is yet another point

which I wish to raise if I may," said the Polish Ambassador, after having discussed many other subjects.

"But of course, Mr. Ambassador," answered Stalin politely and he nodded his head, bent over a scrap of paper on which he was drawing a spear. Just an ordinary Cossack spear . . .

"If I may say so, Mr. President, you are the author of the amnesty granted to Polish citizens on USSR territory. Would you consent to insist that this gesture of yours is put into full execution?"

"Do you mean to say that there are still Poles who have not been released?" exclaimed Stalin, as if he had heard about it for the first time. Molotov, who was sitting at the other end of the table, never even winked.

"From the camp of Starobielsk which was disbanded in the spring of 1940, we haven't found one man as yet . . ."

Mr. Kot wanted to mention also the camps of Kozielsk and Ostashkov, but Stalin interrupted him.

"I shall certainly look into it. But funny things often happen with those releases. What was the name of that general who commanded the defence of Lwow? General Langer, I believe."

"General Langner, Mr. President," corrected the Polish Ambassador.

"Yes, of course, General Langner. Well, we let him out, as early as last year. We even brought him to Moscow and held interviews with him. In the end he escaped abroad, if I'm right, to Rumania."

Molotov nodded in the affirmative.

"There are no exceptions to the amnesty granted," continued Stalin. "But the same may have happened to some military personnel, as happened to General Langner."

"We have names and lists," answered Mr. Kot. "For instance, it has been impossible to trace General Haller, and officers are missing from Starobielsk, Kozielsk

and Ostashkov, who were deported from there in April and May 1940."

"We have released everyone, even those whom General Sikorski had sent over to destroy bridges and kill Soviet citizens. We have released even those." Stalin crumpled up the slip of paper and threw it under the table. "As a matter of fact, it was not Sikorski who had sent them but his Chief of Staff, Sosnkowski."<sup>1</sup>

"I would nevertheless request you, Mr. President," recommenced the Polish Ambassador, "to issue orders that the officers, whom we need to organize the army, should be released. We have documents showing when they were deported from the camps."

"Have you got exact lists?" Stalin suddenly showed great interest. He got up and started pacing up and down the room.

"All the names had been written down by the Russian camp commandants, who took a roll-call of all prisoners daily. In addition to that the NKVD had interrogated each of the prisoners separately. We were unable to find any of the officers of General Anders' staff, of the Army he commanded in Poland."

Stalin stopped pacing the room and listened attentively to those last words. He lit a cigarette. Then he went up to the telephone which stood on the table at which Molotov was sitting. With a quick gesture he picked up the receiver. Molotov, on whose face the trace of a smile flickered for a moment, intervened.

"No, to get a connection with the exchange you must —" and he switched a knob on the board. He then sat down again, this time at the main conference table. Silence reigned while Stalin waited for a connection with the NKVD.

"Stalin speaking. Have all the Poles been released from prisons?"

<sup>1</sup> Gen. Sosnkowski was never Gen. Sikorski's Chief of Staff. He was Minister for War and later Commander-in-Chief Polish Army.

Again a silence while he listened.

Then—"Because I have the Polish Ambassador here with me who maintains that all have not been released."

He again listened for a long time and finally he replaced the receiver. When he returned to the conference table, he changed the subject of conversation. After about five, or perhaps even eight, minutes the telephone rang. Stalin went over and answered the call himself. He listened to what most certainly must have been an answer to his previous question. He never said anything, except to mutter unintelligibly to himself. Finally, he put down the receiver and returned once more to the table. But this time, he remained silent. The Polish Ambassador decided that it was useless to prolong the interview.

Joseph Stalin had plainly said that he did not know either where they were, or what could possibly have happened to the Polish prisoners who had been kept in the camps of Starobielsk, Kozielsk and Ostashkov during 1939-1940.

But even after that the Polish side still did not accept the possibility that the 15,000 prisoners had vanished for good. In spite of the Note of Ambassador Bogomolov and in spite of all the announcements by the Soviet dignitaries that they knew nothing about such prisoners, the Poles refused to believe that the Soviet authorities had freed these men in 1940, and also refused to believe that they were anywhere else but on Soviet territory. On the contrary, they tried to console themselves by clinging obstinately to the theory that the Soviet Government, having sentenced them to live under awful conditions, were unwilling to own it, and tried to hush the whole thing up by delaying their extradition, and probably would do it in stages, only releasing a few at a time. Or maybe, they were really unable to bring them back from beyond the Arctic Circle. It was winter; a terrible winter which held



the whole country in its icy grip. Of course these consolatory thoughts at the same time gave place to anxiety as to how these poor people lived in the appalling conditions of the Soviet Concentration Camps in the polar zone.

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The first conversation with Stalin took place on November the 14th, 1941. Since then no further steps were taken by the Polish authorities who waited for the visit to Russia of General Sikorski.

On the 1st of December the Polish Embassy prepared an *aide-mémoire* on the subject of the interned members of the Polish Forces in the camps of Starobielsk, Kozielsk and Ostashkov. This *aide-mémoire* was given to Sikorski on his arrival, and it established beyond any doubt that 97% of the inmates of these three camps were deported thence in the spring of 1940, and ever since, all trace of them had been lost.

General Sikorski arrived in Moscow, and having acquainted himself with the text of this *aide-mémoire*, summoned General Anders who acted then as Commander of all Polish Forces on Soviet territory, and then, together with him and Mr. Kot, paid a visit to the Kremlin. That was on the 3rd of December, and he was received by Stalin in the presence of the indispensable Mr. Molotov. The following conversation took place.

GEN. SIKORSKI: I wish to state, Mr. President, that your decree of amnesty is not carried out to its full extent. Many of our best men haven't yet been released from prisons and camps.

STALIN (drawing as usual): That is impossible because the amnesty applied to all, and all the Poles have been set free. (His last words were spoken as if to Molotov who affirms by nodding his head.)

SIKORSKI: It ought not to be our job to supply the complete lists of these men, whom your camp com-

manders registered themselves. (He took a list from Gen. Anders.) I have with me a list of about 4,000 officers deported forcibly and who must still be in prisons or camps of forced labour. Even this list is still incomplete, as it contains only those names which it was possible to compile from memory. I have ordered that they be checked in Poland, with which we are in constant touch, to ascertain whether they are there. It appears that none of them are there, neither are they in our prisoner-of-war camps in Germany. These men are here. None of them has returned.

STALIN: That is impossible. They have escaped.

GEN. ANDERS: Where could they have escaped to?

STALIN: Oh, well, to Manchuria for instance.

ANDERS: It is impossible that they could have all escaped. I am personally acquainted with the greater part of the officers mentioned in these lists. Among them are many of my own staff officers and commanders.

STALIN: They have certainly been released already but have not managed to reach you as yet.

SIKORSKI: Russia is immense and so are her difficulties. Perhaps the local authorities have not carried out the instructions. If any of them had escaped over the Russian frontier, they would most certainly have reported to me.

STALIN: You should know that the Soviet Government has not the slightest reason for retaining a single Pole.

MOLOTOV: We have retained only those who, already after the Polish campaign, committed crimes, were engaged in sabotage, installed broadcasting stations, etc. I shouldn't think those are the same ones you are searching for?

KOT: Of course not. But nevertheless, I did ask for lists of these men as well, because in many cases ardent patriots and quite innocent people are being accused.

Molotov nodded.

SIKORSKI: It would be very desirable, Mr. President, if you agreed personally to issue a public statement on this subject with the aim of causing a change of the Russian attitude towards the Poles. It should be remembered that these men are no 'tourists' but that they were forcibly deported from their homes. They didn't choose to come here and they have been through some very hard times.

STALIN: That shall be settled. Special orders will be issued to executive authorities, but, on the other hand, you mustn't forget that we are waging a war.

The above conversation only strengthened the opinion prevailing in Polish quarters that the missing prisoners were alive after all, and were kept somewhere in the far North or even further away in the East, which would explain Stalin's remark that "they have escaped to Manchuria" as well as explaining his further words—that all had been released but "have not managed to reach you as yet," and finally his last promise that "special orders" would be issued to the executive authorities.

After that last visit to the Kremlin, there came a pause in diplomatic interventions. In the meantime, Polish authorities undertook further investigations on their own. For this purpose, Captain Joseph Czapski, previously mentioned in this book, who had been released from the camp at Gruzoviec, was chosen. Omitting all intermediate dignitaries, he made his way straight to General Nasyedkin, Chief Commander of all Soviet Camps (GULAG) and later on personally interviewed two NKVD Generals—Bzirov and Rajchman. Not one of these "top-ranking" Soviet officials "knew anything" as to what had happened—or even what could have happened—to the 15,000 Polish prisoners of war! Meanwhile another year had passed and it was now 1942.

On the 28th of January, the Polish Government in London tried to intervene once more on behalf of the missing prisoners. Another Note was sent, the fiftieth on the subject. It was left unanswered by the Soviet Government . . . The Poles waited again.

They waited through January and then through February. It was decided to wait until the end of the winter. All eyes looked to the North. To make it more comprehensible why Polish hopes attached such importance to the polar zone, it must be understood that the majority of Soviet concentration camps were placed beyond the Arctic Circle. It was not merely a matter of thousands of prisoners there, but millions ! And these hopes were continually raised by the still returning Poles, who, single handed or in little groups, obstinately pushed southwards through tundras and marshes, and at cross-roads or resting points or in the former transit camps, heard gossip about or found traces of other Polish prisoners. But these were mistaken. None of the gossip, none of the rumours referred to the prisoners from Starobielsk, Kozielsk, or Ostashkov, but always to those others, who, after being interned in the Baltic States, had fallen into Soviet hands when these little states were annexed, and were sent to the far North for compulsory labour. In the war-time chaos, when the fates of so many were confused and entangled, such a mistake was easy.

And so everybody waited for the ice-bound rivers to break. But in the North that occurs so late . . .

Not waiting for this, on the 18th of March, 1942, General Anders accompanied by his Chief of Staff, Colonel Okolicki, asked for a second interview with the "all powerful." Stalin invited them to the Kremlin ; of course Molotov was also there.

Anders told Stalin about the conditions under which the Polish Army was being formed in Russia, and ended by saying :

"But we still lack our officers. Those from Starobiel'sk, Kozielsk and Ostashkov haven't been found yet. They must still be somewhere in your hands. We have collected additional data about them." He handed over two lists which Molotov took. "They may have gone astray somewhere. We have traces of their stay in Kolyma."

Stalin, smoking a cigarette, was again drawing something with his pencil. He answered:

"I have already given all instructions that they should be released. They say that they are even in Francis Joseph Land, but there is no one there. I do not know where they are. Why should I want to detain them? It may be that they are in camps in territories taken over by the Germans and have dispersed there."

"That is impossible. We should know of it," said Col. Okolicki.

"We have only detained those Poles who acted as spies in the pay of the Germans . . ." answered Stalin curtly and changed the topic of conversation.

"In territories taken over by the Germans . . ."? Dispersed? In what place, and from what camp? From whence could they have come to find themselves on those territories?

All of a sudden, after eight months of vain search, after fifty Diplomatic Notes, innumerable conferences, interventions, pleas, and requests, to all of which there was no answer but "We do not know!" Stalin now threw in this apparently incomprehensible sentence. He said it quite casually, while drawing on a scrap of paper, this time, the silhouette of a fantastic bull . . . Was it a sudden brainwave, or had it been carefully contrived beforehand? Perhaps it was a test-balloon sent up to observe the reaction to what a year later would become the foundation of the Soviet official statement. Had a decisive turning point been reached in the Soviet attitude, caused by the rising tension due to the obstin-

ate pressure exercised by the Polish authorities? Probably not. Because for a long time yet, in further negotiations and later official statements in this same matter, nothing would be advanced to support the theory let out by Stalin between two puffs of cigarette smoke. On the contrary . . .

After one more memorandum about the missing prisoners which the Polish Government sent on the 19th of May, 1942, and yet a further Note sent on the 23th of June the same year, the People's Commissariat for Foreign Affairs issued an *aide-mémoire* on the 10th of July, 1942, in which it stated :

It is known that many Polish citizens, who were released even before the granting of the amnesty, left the USSR and returned to their country. It must be also mentioned that many Polish citizens from among these who were set free had escaped abroad, some of whom fled to Germany . . . Finally in view of the single and unorganized journeys in the winter of 1941 from the Northern parts of the USSR to the South, undertaken against repeated warnings of the People's Commissariat, a certain amount of Polish citizens fell ill on the way and had to be retained at various railway stations. Of these, not a few had died. All the above instances could, of course, contribute to the fact that a certain amount of Polish citizens have not shown signs of their whereabouts.

Two days before this announcement was sent which finally closed all discussion on the subject, on the 8th July, Mr. Kot, accompanied by the Polish Chargé d'Affaires, Mr. Sokolnicki, paid a farewell visit to Mr. Vyshinsky. During that visit, in a conversation of informal character, Vyshinsky said :

"As regards the alleged detention of Poles in prisons or camps, I can assure you, Mr. Ambassador, that,

after having looked into it myself, I have ascertained that none of them are so detained. There are no Polish officers in the far or near North, nor anywhere else. Perhaps they are outside the Soviet Union. Maybe some of them died . . . All have been released. Some were released before our war with the Germans, some afterwards."

"As regards these officers, I must say that I am receiving from Poland itself the greatest number of enquiries from families, full of anxiety as to their fate, because they are not there. None of them are there," said Mr. Kot.

Mr. Sokolnicki added: "If our prisoners have been released, please give me a list of persons released and the dates and places of release. The Soviet Government has repeatedly made lists of prisoners in the camps and the supplying of such lists ought not to be a difficult thing."

"Unfortunately we have no such lists . . ." and Mr. Vyshinsky spread out his hands in a gesture of helplessness.

From then on, the relations between the two countries began to deteriorate. It became apparent that the Soviet Government, after recovering from the first shock of the German drive, and having checked its further progress, had by no means resigned its claims to that half of Poland which it had annexed in 1939, in joint action with those very Germans whom it was now fighting. And so it began to raise further difficulties which hindered the formation of the Polish Army. This caused the Polish Government to send one more Note, which was delivered to the Soviet Ambassador Bogomolov on the 27th of August, 1942. It stated:

The negative attitude of the Soviet Government to the further development of the Polish forces is also proved by the fact that more than 8,000 Polish

officers who, in 1940, were interned in the prisoner-of-war camps of Ostashkov, Starobielsk and Kozielsk are still missing despite frequent interventions by the Polish Government and although incomplete lists of the names of these officers were delivered to the Chairman of the Council of People's Commissars by General Sikorski in December, 1941, and in March, 1942, by General Anders.

Neither did this last Note in any way affect the attitude of the Soviet Government towards the disappearance of the Polish prisoners. The Russians held to the same version as expressed in their *aide-mémoire* of the 10th of July, 1942, which has already been quoted and gave as the only reason for the disappearance of so many prisoners :

- (1) Their alleged return to Poland.
- (2) Their escape abroad.
- (3) Casualties which occurred on the way to the Polish recruiting centres.

At that time, no other reason was even suggested by the Soviet side.



## VIII

### THE DIREFUL GERMAN BROADCAST

ONCE again, the whole case seemed to be enveloped in an impenetrable fog. It was never mentioned in the world press, because the entire search undertaken by the Polish Government had been kept secret, although of course the British and American authorities were informed of the development of the Russo-Polish negotiations, and the British Government had even intervened in the case. The story was not released to the press for fear of causing what secret diplomatic talks called "a split in the camp of the United Nations." Even more confidential whispers spoke of a fear of blackmail by Soviet Russia. Such a blackmail might start at any moment by Russia threatening to make a separate peace with Germany. That state of affairs lasted all through the autumn of 1942 and the winter of 1942-43. And then with the spring of 1943 came many events which were to change the future of the world.

But even much earlier than that something occurred which did not appear to be of noticeable importance compared with many other happenings. The Germans had added one more link to the chain of violations of both international and military law: they organized compulsory recruitment of the population of occupied territories for the purpose of using them directly in their war effort. Amongst those recruited were many Poles, labourers, drivers and others who were mobilized into the "Todt" organization. Many of them were sent to the Russian front as early as the summer of 1942.

Close to the front was the town of Smolensk which had been in the hands of the Germans since July, 1941.

Twelve kilometres to the west, there was a small railway station called Gniezdovo, and four kilometres from this, a forest called Katyn Wood. Part of it was called "Goat Hills" (*Kosogory*). In the neighbourhood of Kosogory, there lived an old peasant of the name of Partemon Kisielev, at that time aged seventy-two.

At the very time when the Soviet Government delivered its *aide-memoire* of the 10th of July, 1942, in which it stated that it had no idea what possibly could have happened to the missing Poles, when Ambassador Kot had his last talk with Commissar Vyshinsky and the Polish Government in far-distant London was discussing the text of its fiftieth or more Diplomatic Note—it so happened that a few Polish workers paid a visit to the cottage of old Partemon Kisielev. The Poles had been deported by the Germans for forced labour and were working in the neighbourhood of Smolensk. For many months to come, Kisielev never mentioned to anyone what he had talked about with those Poles, on that summer evening. Why should he? Whose business was it? People are not very talkative in that part of the world . . . That was July, 1942.

It was only on the 13th of April, 1943, at 9.15 according to New York time, that the world was informed by the Berlin Broadcasting Station of something which could have been the topic of conversation in old Kisielev's cottage.

The Berlin communiqué ran as follows:

It is reported from Smolensk that the local population has indicated to the German authorities a place in which the Bolsheviks had perpetrated secretly mass executions and where the GPU had murdered 10,000 Polish officers. The German authorities inspected the place called Kosogory, which is a Soviet summer resting place, and made the most horrific discovery. A great pit was found, 28 metres long and 16 metres

wide, filled with 12 layers of bodies of Polish officers, numbering about 3,000. They were clad in full military uniform, and while many of them had their hands tied, all of them had wounds in the back of their heads caused by pistol shots. The identification of the bodies will not cause great difficulties because of the mummifying property of the soil and because the Bolsheviks had left on the bodies the identity documents of the victims. It has already been ascertained that among the murdered is a General Smorawinski from Lublin. These officers had been previously in Kozielsk near Orel, from whence they had been brought in cattle wagons to Smolensk in February and March, 1940, and further on, taken in lorries to Kosogory where all were murdered by the Bolsheviks.

The discovery of and search for further grave pits is taking place. Under layers dug up already, new layers are found . . . The total figure of the murdered officers is estimated at 10,000 which would more or less correspond to the entire number of Polish officers taken as prisoners of war by the Bolsheviks. Norwegian press correspondents who arrived to inspect the place, and with their own eyes could ascertain the truth, have reported about the crime to the Oslo newspapers.

There was no exaggeration in stating that this news was horrific. It was a crime which—even in a war so abundant in crimes—both in size and quality, surpassed all others. The first reaction of the Democratic world was not to believe it. Firstly because it was announced by the Germans on whose conscience lay so many crimes of their own. Public opinion in the Western World knew nothing about the case of the 15,000 missing Polish officers, and the vain search for over a year. Not a single detail had been published in the Allied press.

The Berlin radio continued to supply further details in their broadcasts :

In the summer months of 1942, a few Poles, members of labour units attached to the German army, and some civilians who had been liberated from enslavement by the Bolsheviks, had learned from the local population that the Bolsheviks had carried out executions of Poles in the neighbourhood of Smolensk. From these rumours it was further made known that the murdered men were buried most probably in the Katyn wood, to the right from the road leading from the Smolensk-Katyn highway to the summer rest house of the NKVD (formerly GPU).

Apparently, to the railway station in Gniezdovo arrived repeated transports of prisoners, Polish officers, who were next loaded into trucks and driven to the neighbouring Katyn wood. The persons mentioned took interest in the fate of their countrymen, and started digging up a little hillock which already at first glance seemed artificial and did not fit the natural surroundings. And indeed they soon struck upon the body of a Polish officer judging by the uniform in which it was clad. But initially, nobody supposed that it was a mass grave which had been discovered. As the German unit to which these Poles were attached had to leave the neighbourhood, they had to give up further investigation.

Terrorized by the Bolshevik rule, the local population was unwilling to repeat what it had lived through in 1940. It was only in Spring 1943 that the news about the bodies buried in the Katyn wood first reached the German authorities. Upon which the authorities undertook systematic and thorough enquiries, which gradually allowed them to reconstruct with terrifying exactness the event which immediately preceded the mass murder. And one by one

the horrific details were revealed. Statements given under oath by many witnesses clearly elucidate the whole matter and they conform with the observations derived from the exhumation researches. These statements also testify that the Katyn wood has already for many years been used as a place of execution by the GPU.

All this was a bombshell for London. British governmental circles knew very well that the number of the murdered, quoted by the Germans, matched more or less the figures of the missing prisoners which the Polish Government had searched for in the Soviet Union. Besides, the British Government knew very well the text of the Polish Diplomatic Notes, and the minutes of the conversations held about this matter. It also knew perfectly well what were the answers given by the Soviet Government to the Poles.

In the evening the Germans broadcast the text of the statement given by old Partemon Kisielev from which the world learnt of the visit to his cottage in 1942 by the Poles in the "Todt" organization. Apparently they had heard about Polish officers being murdered, and they were told that Kisielev knew more about it than any of the other local inhabitants, because he lived nearest to the place. And so these ten Poles paid him a visit. They asked him to show them the exact spot. They took spades with them. After having ascertained the truth, they filled up the holes they had dug, and raised two crosses, cut out of birch wood, upon the grave.

\* \* \* \* \*

Throughout the whole of the 14th of April a vexed silence reigned in the Allied camp. But forty-eight hours after the German radio's revelations to the world, the Soviet Government—the same Soviet Government which for the past year was unable to give any indication

as to the whereabouts of the missing Polish prisoners, the very same Government whose dictator, Stalin, together with his ministers and the chiefs of his political police, the NKVD, the Camp commanders and all other functionaries of this enormous state, could only spread their hands and helplessly shrug their shoulders—now suddenly, by means of the official agency “Tass,” stated as a notoriously well-known fact:

The Polish prisoners in question were interned in the vicinity of Smolensk in special camps and were employed in road construction. It was impossible to evacuate them at the time of the approach of the German troops, and as a result they fell into their hands. If, therefore, they have been found murdered, it means that they have been murdered by the Germans, who, for reasons of provocation, claim now that the crime has been committed by Soviet authorities.

And the British Government, although acquainted with the text of the *aide-memoire* delivered by the Soviet Government on the 10th of July, 1942, which is in direct contradiction to this new version, issued orders to publish this new Soviet statement. On the 15th of April, 1943, at 7.15, the B.B.C. broadcast the following communiqué.

In a statement broadcast today, Moscow Radio officially and categorically denied the news propounded by the Germans about the alleged shooting of Polish officers by the Soviet authorities. These German lies indicate the fate which met these officers whom the Germans employed in 1941 for construction works in the neighbourhood. The Moscow transmission was interrupted all along and deafened by Berlin.

From that moment, the Soviet version repeated by

Moscow Radio and the Soviet press, established itself and really became "notoriously" known—"Polish prisoners, since 1940 assembled in camps around Smolensk, and employed in the neighbourhood, fell into the hands of the Germans in July 1941 and were subsequently shot by the Germans in August-September of the same year."

But Polish public opinion reacted differently to that of British official circles. This time it was no longer a question of one or another political action, it was an issue which demanded a decision in the face of a blow delivered to the entire Polish Nation. For how else could one describe the secret murder of thousands of the best of the nation's sons, piled like dung in ghastly pits and hidden under a layer of sand?

Among the documentary material gathered in London after the war relating to the Katyn crime, there is the following passage which describes the reaction in Polish circles and Polish opinion at the time.

The revelations broadcast by the Germans shook to the core Polish public opinion abroad. The corroboration of the news leaves no doubt whatever that the bodies discovered in Katyn are in fact those of murdered Polish officers. Simultaneously, renewed attention was given to the Notes and protocols of Polish-Soviet talks on the subject. In the light of the German disclosure, the latter acquired new and expressive meaning:

It is only now that such announcements, hitherto variously commented upon, become plain.

1. The embarrassment of Vyshinsky when the question of the missing Polish officers was first mentioned to him during a conversation of the 6th of October, 1941.

2. His irritation during a conversation held on the 14th of October and his promise to return "all those

whom we have" with a simultaneous stressing that "we cannot return those whom we haven't got."

3. The failure to fulfil a categorical promise made by Vyshinsky during an interview on the 12th of November, 1941, in which he said: "We have complete lists of both those alive and those dead. I have promised to supply these lists and I shall do it . . ."

4. The awkward silence of Stalin during the interview on the 14th of November, 1941.

5. His incredible and most strange thesis made during an interview on the 3rd of December, 1941, when he hinted at the probability that thousands of the missing prisoners from Soviet camps had escaped to Manchuria.

6. The strange experience of Mr. Czapski in Chkalov and Moscow.

7. Stalin's words on the 18th of March, 1942: "I do not know where they are . . ."

8. The statement made in the Soviet *aide-mémoire* of the 10th of July, 1942.

On the 16th of April, 1943, a meeting of the Council of Ministers of the Polish Government was held in London. There followed a long exchange of Notes, statements and diplomatic moves. These in a precise manner revealed the attitude of the various States concerned, which either tried to help to solve the riddle—or endeavoured to turn aside from the track which led to the truth.



## IX

### RED CROSS INVESTIGATION REJECTED

THE political situation caused by the German revelations was undoubtedly a difficult one. Poland, the country which had first put up a resistance to Hitler's aggression, and which, according to President Roosevelt's own words, had become the "Inspiration of the other nations," was continuous in her loyalty to the Allies' struggle against Germany, and had no intention of renouncing that loyalty nor of breaking the solidarity of the United Nations, either for political considerations or sentimental reasons. But there exist certain limits to everything in this limited world of ours. And even the most carefully calculated political considerations have a limit which no nation can exceed.

It was in the interest of the whole world engaged upon the struggle against Hitler, to Poland perhaps even more than to the others, that these German revelations should be proved false. But amongst all the nations and governments concerned, the Polish Government was the only one to bear direct responsibility for the human lives involved—those of Polish citizens and soldiers—and it could not play with them as if they were cards in a game, against all principles of justice and morality. Over there, in their own country, tens of thousands from the bereaved families, mothers and children, mourned the missing prisoners, having just learned that, contrary to all the laws of civilization, they had been murdered in secrecy and their bodies thrown into pits to be hidden under the earth . . . by an unknown although implied

murderer. And who were they? Generals, Colonels, and other officers, whose breasts were still adorned with the medals and crosses granted to them by their grateful country! In the face of this awful atrocity no Government in the world could remain passive without losing the right to represent its people, and no Government could leave the matter just as it was. The Polish Government could not but request an explanation of the crime.

But in view of the political complications, who could possibly undertake to supply a satisfactory explanation? With the Germans occupying the district in which the crime had been committed, how was it possible to guarantee an unbiassed investigation of all the circumstances and a fair summing-up of the facts?

There exists, however, a certain institution, created in 1864 and upheld by the Geneva Convention—the International Red Cross. In the last seventy-nine years this institution had rendered incalculable services to humanity forever embroiled in bloody contests. No country in the world would ever dream of challenging the impartiality, the dignity and the authority of the International Red Cross and no country ever has. It was therefore understandable that, four days after the first German disclosure about the Katyn murder, on the 17th of April, 1943, the following communiqué was issued by the Council of Polish Ministers in London:

No Pole can help but be deeply shocked by the news now given the widest publicity by the Germans, of the discovery of the bodies of the Polish officers missing in the USSR, in a common grave near Smolensk, and of the mass execution of which they were victims.

The Polish Government has instructed their representative in Switzerland to request the International Red Cross in Geneva to send a delegation to investigate the true state of affairs on the spot. It is desired that the findings of this protective institution, which

is to be trusted with the task of clarifying the matter and establishing responsibility, should be issued without delay.

On the same day, General Kukiel, the Polish Minister of Defence, also issued a communiqué which, after summarizing the whole case, concluded with this paragraph :

We have become accustomed to the lies of German propaganda and we understand the purpose behind its latest revelations. In view, however, of the abundant and detailed German information concerning the discovery of the bodies of many thousands of Polish officers, near Smolensk, and the categorical statement that they were murdered by the Soviet authorities in the spring of 1940, the necessity has arisen that the mass graves discovered should be investigated and the facts alleged verified by a competent international body, such as the International Red Cross. The Polish Government has therefore approached this institution with a view to their sending a delegation to the place where the massacre of Polish prisoners of war is said to have taken place.

During the same meeting at which they decided to approach the International Red Cross, the Polish Council of Ministers also decided to make a final approach to the Soviet Government, asking for an explanation.

A Note was therefore handed to the Soviet Ambassador in London. In it, the Polish Government, after referring to the numerous times when the question of the missing prisoners had been raised, drew attention to the fact that they had never yet received a satisfactory explanation as to where the missing prisoners had been sent in 1940, nor had they been told where they now were. Further on, they stated :

If however, as shown by the communiqué of the Soviet Information Bureau, of the 15th of April, 1943, the Government of the USSR would seem to be in possession of more ample information on this matter than was communicated to the representative of the Polish Government some time ago, I beg once more to request you, Mr. Ambassador, to communicate to the Polish Government detailed and precise information as to the fate of the prisoners of war . . .

Public opinion in Poland and throughout the world has rightly been so deeply shocked, that only irrefutable facts can outweigh the numerous and detailed German statements concerning the discovery of the bodies of many thousands of Polish officers murdered near Smolensk in the spring of 1940.

To this Note, no answer was ever received.

In the meantime, the decision of the Polish Government to ask the International Red Cross to investigate the matter, reached Prince Radziwill, the Delegate of the Polish Red Cross in Switzerland, on the 17th of April at 4 p.m. By 4.30, the Note was handed to Mr. Rueger, the representative of the International Red Cross, who informed the Polish Delegate that a similar request to investigate the Katyn case had been handed in, the day before, by the representative of the German Red Cross.

The German attitude was extremely significant. They could have no possible illusion whatever that once the International Red Cross had sent its delegation to the place of the crime, it could either be bribed or cheated into issuing a statement contrary to the truth. This would lead to an assumption that the Germans were quite certain that *their* version could only be fully confirmed, and that they were not afraid of the truth being revealed to the whole world. Naturally, from the political point of view they were anxious to do anything possible to defame the Soviet Union.

The Soviet Government denied the German allegations and accused the Germans of committing the crime. But, in view of the evidence which the Germans claimed to possess, ought it to have striven most keenly for the participation of an entirely non-political and authoritative body to investigate the case and to lift all possible shadow of doubt? Surely that is what it should have done . . . provided the version it gave was the true one.

The future course of events was as follows. As both parties engaged in war, i.e. Poland and Germany, had sent in a similar request, which according to a resolution adopted by the International Red Cross at the beginning of the Second World War was the required condition for undertaking an international investigation of any case, the representative of the I.R.C. informed the Polish Delegate that the requests would be, most probably, taken into consideration by the Council. He even announced the calling of a competent commission which would be entrusted with the choice of a neutral delegation for the purpose. The meeting of the commission was fixed for the 20th of April, 1943.

But that meeting was never to take place. Suddenly, the attitude of the International Red Cross changed completely. That change was due to pressure exercised by the Soviet Government. In place of the expected meeting, the I.R.C. issued a memorandum. Its third paragraph ran :

According to the spirit of the Memorandum of the 12th of September, 1939, in principle the International Red Cross cannot take into consideration the participation by technical procedure of identifying the bodies by its own experts, without the consent of all parties concerned.

The Polish Delegate tried to intervene. He was

privately informed that the I.R.C. had already decided to send to Katyn a commission composed of Swedish, Portuguese and Swiss experts under the chairmanship of a Swiss specialist. But third parties suggested that such a move would be very ill-considered by the Soviet Union . . . The Soviet Union was also a party concerned . . . The Council of the I.R.C. therefore decided that it could not undertake enquiries without the consent of the Soviet Union. There was no way out of the deadlock, unless the Polish Government, either directly, or indirectly through the offices of a third party, persuaded the Soviet Government to grant their permission. A similar answer had already been sent to the German Red Cross. Let the Polish side approach the Soviet Government by the intermediary of a *puissance protectrice* . . .

But the whole story had become known and could no longer be discreetly handled. All the world knew of the proposed intervention of the International Red Cross, and its statement was awaited with great interest. Owing to this, the Council of the International Red Cross was compelled to issue a communiqué, dated the 23rd of April, 1943 :

The German Red Cross and the Polish Red Cross in London have approached the International Red Cross with a request to participate in the identification of the bodies which, according to German reports, have been discovered in the vicinity of Smolensk. To both these requests, the International Red Cross had answered that in principle they are ready to assist in the selection of neutral experts, on condition that the request of all parties concerned in the matter conforms with the memorandum which the Committee sent to all belligerent nations at the beginning of the war, the principles on which it could take part in such enquiries.

Naturally, in this particular case, the word "all" referred to the Soviet Union. But the Soviet Government not only refused to give its consent for the participation of a Red Cross Commission in the investigations, but, two days before the issue of the communiqué by the I.R.C., broadcast an article which had appeared in the Soviet paper *Pravda* under the title "Polish collaborators of Hitler." In that article the official paper of the Communist party accused the Polish Government of nothing more or less than collaboration with Hitler! Simultaneously the Government sponsored news agency "Tass" launched an attack upon the Government of General Sikorski, claiming that the Polish request to the International Red Cross proved how strong were the pro-Hitlerite elements in Polish governmental circles.

This unexpected attitude of the Soviet Government caused consternation in the public opinion of the Western Nations. It was obvious that such a move not only compromised the Soviet Government in the eyes of the world, because it proved that the Bolsheviks were afraid of an impartial enquiry, but that it even came close to ridicule. The same Soviet Government which had collaborated with Hitler from 1939 to 1941 now accused the Polish Government—the first to offer resistance to Hitlerite aggression—of aiding and abetting Hitler!

At first sight the statement issued by Tass seemed to be a misunderstanding or joke. But the Soviet Government was well aware of what it was doing. It knew very well that at that stage of the war no one was going to take the Soviet Union as a joke . . . The years 1942 and 1943 were the period of the most ardent American and British endeavours for Soviet friendship. A few months earlier, Churchill, while in Moscow, shook hands heartily with Stalin and paid him the Englishman's greatest compliment when he said that the Red Dictator

"had a keen sense of humour." And less than a year after these events, King George VI was to send to Stalin, in honour of the city named after him, a Sword of Honour with a golden hilt.

With such a background, the problem of the secret murder of these 10,000 Polish officers became the more unpleasant, in both Washington and London. The Western Allies would have preferred the case to be hushed up instead of attracting publicity, and they were most anxious to settle it as quickly as possible and remove it from the front pages of the press, out of the public eye.

Churchill laid great hopes in the person of General Sikorski whom he knew as a tough politician, but at the same time a determined adherent of Russo-Polish friendship. It was Easter Week . . . On the night before Easter Sunday (24-25th April) diplomatic pressure was used to urge General Sikorski to issue an official statement denying the possibility that the Katyn victims had been murdered by the Russians, and proclaiming the whole affair as a slander of German propaganda. General Sikorski was the closest adherent of Polish collaboration with Russia. He was the author of the agreement signed with the Soviet Government on the 30th of July, 1941, in which he gave the greatest concession possible, and brushed aside the past, the broken treaties, the treacherous assault and the martyrdom of thousands of Poles. But this time, the General said : "No !"

Such an answer ought not to surprise anyone. Whether General Sikorski was a good or bad politician, he was above all an honest soldier and a good Pole. As such, he could not have answered otherwise than "No !" in face of a strong doubt. There was plenty of indirect evidence. And in spite of all other issues he felt certain that the crime had been committed by the Bolsheviks.

Twenty-four hours after his refusal to comply with



this suggestion of the Allies, the Polish Ambassador in Moscow, Mr. Romer, was summoned to the Commissariat of Foreign Affairs at 0.15 a.m. by Mr. Molotov, in a very similar manner to that in which the former Ambassador, Mr. Grzybowski, had been summoned, three and a half years before, and to him likewise, a Note was read.

The Note contained the abuse and invective which had already been addressed to the Polish Government in the article previously published in *Pravda* and in the official communiqué of the Tass agency, accusing the Polish Government of "collaboration with Hitler." It ended by announcing the severing of diplomatic relations between the Soviet Union and Poland. It stated that the reason for this rupture was the Polish Government's application to the International Red Cross in Geneva, requesting it to undertake the investigation of the Katyn crime. It stated :

. . . Clearly such an "investigation" conducted behind the back of the Soviet Union cannot evoke the confidence of people possessing any degree of honesty . . .

. . . For the above reasons, the Soviet Government has decided to sever relations with the Polish Government.

The Polish Ambassador made a similar answer to his predecessor in 1939. He declared : " I refuse to accept this Note, and I state at the same time that it contains facts inconsistent with the truth, and false abuse."

But how could such a gesture help in a situation enforced by the stronger ? And all the strength was upon the Soviet side. On the 2nd of February that same year, the great German defeat of Stalingrad had taken place. The Soviet Union of 1943 was no longer the same as the Soviet Union of 1941. Its decision to

sever relations with Poland caused uneasiness in the Allied camp. Katyn had ceased to be a crime; it had become a political problem. The Soviet move was the first sign of a break in the unity of the United Nations. What might this lead to in the future? What would happen if England and America were to back Poland? Undoubtedly to a separate peace between Germany and Russia. Although such a development seemed scarcely possible, Churchill was determined at all costs to avoid the slightest shadow of it.

Just then Poland represented no effective strength in the materialistic sense. The country was under enemy occupation, and abroad Poland only had a handful of soldiers. But the Soviet Union was a power with which to be reckoned. If the Western Allies had to choose between an alliance with Russia and an alliance with Poland, they undoubtedly saw that their interests lay with the former. But all the political aspects were not so simple—on the contrary, they were very complicated. To abandon Poland in her just claims was to give plenty of good arguments to the propaganda of Dr. Goebbels. It would raise indignation in neutral opinion, and cement the alliance between Germany and her satellites, Finland, Rumania, Hungary, Slovakia and Bulgaria. It would shake the faith of such countries as Yugoslavia, Greece, Norway and even perhaps France, in the common cause. The Western Powers could not yet afford to undermine the principles for which they stood. Very energetic steps were taken to bring about a settlement between the two parties.

On the 4th of May, 1943, while speaking of current political affairs, Mr. Anthony Eden told the House of Commons :

His Majesty's Government have used their best efforts to persuade both the Poles and the Russians not to allow these German manoeuvres to have even

a semblance of success. It is therefore with regret that they learned that, following an appeal by the Polish Government to the International Red Cross to investigate the German story, the Soviet Government felt compelled to interrupt relations with the Polish Government.

But these were only words, words, words . . . Once again, pressure was exercised on General Sikorski urging him to withdraw that request from the International Red Cross. But such a withdrawal had ceased to be essential in the face of Russia's attitude which categorically rejected any intervention, and because of the attitude of the International Red Cross which would not undertake any investigations without the permission of the Soviet Union.

At the same time the press of the neutral countries, such as Switzerland, Sweden and Turkey, quite openly maintained that the gruesome murder in Katyn had been committed by the Bolsheviks. And soon afterwards, independent papers both in America and Great Britain began to criticize the attitude adopted by the Soviet Government.

And so, all the efforts to bridge the gap, and compose the Russo-Polish conflict failed. They never could have succeeded. The Soviet Union was well aware of its own strength. Fortified by their military allies, and also by Hitler's insane policy towards the peoples and countries occupied by the Germans, which not only cemented all Europe together against him, but crippled the possibility of staging some kind of counter-revolution on Russian territories by mobilizing anti-Communist tendencies—the Soviet Union was already in position to uncover its cards and reveal its true aims in regard to Poland. As a result they not only emphatically stressed in their subsequent declarations that they still considered as an integral part of the Soviet Union that

half of Poland annexed under the Ribbentrop-Molotov Agreement in 1939, but they even quite openly began to organize a "Polish" policy of their own. In Moscow, a "Committee of Polish Patriots" was formed—composed of Communists. Simultaneously, after the Polish Army organized on Soviet territory by General Anders had been withdrawn to Persia, a new Polish-Soviet Army was formed. The command of this new Army was entrusted to "General" Berling.

Thus began the realization of those Russian plans, first hinted in the speech of Commissar Molotov in October 1939, and later on discussed by Commissars Merkulov and Beria in Autumn 1940.

Under these circumstances, any impartial investigation which could be considered authoritative by the democratic world was impossible. The only thing which remained for the Soviet Government to insist upon was that any official talk upon the subject amongst the United Nations should be silenced once and for all.

But General Sikorski's attitude remained unyielding. In early summer he travelled to the Near East to inspect the Polish troops stationed there. On the 2nd of July, at the Headquarters of the Polish Representative in Cairo, he held a press conference, attended by a score of Egyptian, British, American, French and Polish correspondents. That evening, he lingered on the balcony where he had gone to take a breath of air, and stretching himself, confided to the little circle of his most intimate friends who surrounded him, that he felt weary and deluded . . .

"I must return to London tomorrow, and it's curious how I dislike the idea."

"Do stay here, General. Take a few days' rest!"

"Oh, no, I can't!" His energy seemed to return to him. "There are plenty of matters and important talks awaiting me in London. Besides"—and here he smiled—"it's unbearably hot here in Egypt."

The next day he flew westwards from Cairo.

And on the 4th of July, 1943, he was killed in an air-crash at Gibraltar—an air-crash which has never been sufficiently explained. The only one to survive was the pilot . . .

## X

### THE VOICES OF THE DEAD

**D**URING the political and diplomatic events described in the last chapter, in Katyn wood near Smolensk the work of exhumation proceeded. The Germans estimated that the main mass-graves in Kosogory contained about three thousand bodies. Three months before the tragic air crash at Gibraltar which ended General Sikorski's life, the four-hundred-and-twenty-fourth body was dragged out in Katyn. It was searched and the following objects were found in its clothing. Two armlets without any distinctions, a little medallion, a pencil drawing representing a bearded man signed "Kruk Wacław, Kozielsk 1940." and a notebook. In that notebook the murdered man had written his diary. It was fairly easy to decipher the following vital story.

8.IV.1940. I did not write anything for some time as nothing worth noting happened recently. Lately, in the last days of March and the beginning of April, a feverish atmosphere of departure seized the camp. We treated it as usual gossip. But the gossip became a fact. In the first days of April, the first small groups were sent away. From the "Skit" ("Hermitage," a name given to one of the ex-monastery buildings) mostly . . . (illegible) . . . up to about twenty persons. Finally on Saturday the 6th, the Skit was definitely cleared and transferred to the main camp. We were provisionally set up in the major's block. Yesterday a transport departed of higher ranked officers: 3 generals, 25 colonels and about

as many majors. Judging by the atmosphere in which they left we ought to be in high spirits. Today my turn came. After taking a shower-bath, I washed my socks, handkerchiefs . . . (illegible) . . . to the club with the "seers." After having rendered back "State" equipment, we were searched once again in barrack no. 19 and then led to the gate, loaded into cars which took us to a little railway station which was not the Kozielsk station. (Kozielsk is cut off by the floods.) At the station we were transferred into prison railway coaches all under strong guard. In the prison compartment (which I see for the first time), there are thirteen of us. I haven't yet made the acquaintance of some of my new companions. We wait for the departure. Inasmuch as I was full of optimism till now, I began to wonder whether this journey will turn out for our good. What is worse, we do not know whether we shall be able to make out the direction in which we will be taken. There's nothing else but to be patient. We are heading towards Smolensk. The weather is sunny. There's still plenty of snow in the fields.

9.IV.40. Tuesday. The night passed more comfortably than those we had to spend in cattle-wagons in the past. There was a little more space and it did not shake so much. Today the weather is quite wintry. It's cloudy and it snows. There's as much snow in the fields as if it were January. We cannot work out in what direction the train is running. We scarcely moved during the night, just now we passed a larger station called Spas-Demjanskoje. I never noticed such a station on the way to Smolensk on our map. I'm afraid—judging by the weather—that we are heading northwards or even to the north-east.

By day, it is just the same as it used to be, the last time. Yesterday morning they gave us a portion

of bread, some sugar and boiled though cold water. It's close to noon now and still they haven't given us any food. Treatment is also . . . brutal. We are not allowed to leave the compartment no matter what our reasons are. We can only go to the lavatory when it pleases our convoying guards—neither pleas nor shouts can help. (Here the diary returns to some details of the life in Kozielsk.)

It's 2.30 p.m. We have reached Smolensk. For the time being we are held at the goods station. So after all we have been brought to Smolensk.

It's early evening, we have left Smolensk behind and we have arrived at a station called Gniezdovo. It looks as if we are going to be disembarked here because there are plenty of men in uniforms running about the station.

We still haven't received any food. Since yesterday's breakfast, we have lived on a crumb of bread and a mean ration of water . . .

That is where the diary breaks off.

It was already dusk when this four-hundred-and-twenty-fourth body was taken out of the grave. The exhumation work had to be interrupted. The next day, before noon, the four-hundred-and-ninetieth body was brought for inspection. The uniform had the distinctions of a major well preserved. A few objects were found in its pockets: a certificate of inoculation, a card with addresses, and this time two notebooks. The careful study of these documents showed beyond all doubt that the murdered man was Adam Solski, Major of the 57th Infantry Regiment. Major Solski's diary ended up with the following fateful words:

Sunday, 7.IV.1940. In the morning. After yesterday's transfer to the " Skit " group, we have been



ordered now to pack up and be ready by 11.40 a.m., in order to go to the "club" where we shall be searched. We had our meal in the "club" . . . (illegible) . . . After the search at 2.55 p.m., we left the walls and wire of Kozielsk. (The house of Gorkij breathes). At 4.55 p.m. (2.55 p.m. Polish time) we were loaded into prison railway coaches standing on a side-track of the Kozielsk station. People say that 50 per cent of all passenger wagons in the U.S.S.R. are prison coaches. Together with me are Joseph Kutyba, Captain Paul Szyfter, a Major, a Lieut.-Colonel and other captains. Twelve in all. There is barely enough space for seven.

8.IV. At 3.30 a.m. Departure from Kozielsk station. Heading westwards. At 9.45 a.m. arrival at Jelnia.

8.IV.40 (continued). Since noon we are standing on a side track in Smolensk.

9.IV.40. From dawn the day started in a singular way. Departure in prison coach in cells (terrible). Taken somewhere into a wood, something like a country house. Here a special search. I was relieved of my watch, pointing to 6.30 a.m. (4.30 a.m. Polish time), asked about a wedding ring. Roubles, belt and pocket knife taken away . . ."

Here the diary ends.

## XI

### THE INTERNATIONAL COMMISSION OF EXPERTS

THE Germans treated the discovery of the graves in Katyn as a gold-mine for their political propaganda, and they spared no efforts in giving the whole case the widest possible publicity.

Polish-Soviet relations were already so strained, that it needed only one blow to drive them finally apart. Further, the Germans counted on the effect their revelations would have on their own public, and even more so upon the subjugated nations of Europe, especially those of Eastern Europe. The macabre photographs of the Katyn massacre graphically showed them the fate which awaited them should the Bolsheviki ever return to their territories. They also counted on awaking the conscience of the Democratic world to the fact that by entering into an alliance with the Bolsheviki in order to crush the Nazis, they were scarcely achieving the ideals for which they professed to fight.

As a secondary aim, they wanted to remove from the limelight their own atrocities which, with just as great a zeal, were given the utmost publicity by the combined propaganda of the United Nations.

To a certain extent, the Germans did achieve their aims. The severance of diplomatic relations between Poland and Russia—the first breach in the unity of the Allies—was a feat to be set high amongst their successes. It was best expressed by Oberleutnant Gregor Slovenchik, a member of the *Geheime Polizei* (Gestapo) who was sent to Katyn as an agent of the Propaganda Office. In a letter to his wife, he wrote :

. . . From early morning until late in the evening, I remain with my corpses, 14 kilometres from Smolensk. Thanks to these wretched creatures I am able to do something for Germany and that is grand . . . Katyn supplies me with an endless amount of work. I have the works, speak through the microphone and I have started to write a book entitled 'Katyn' . . .

Slovenchik was an Austrian and in civilian life an unimportant Viennese journalist. His wife lived in Vienna. Somehow this letter found its way to the dossier used in the Nuremberg Trial, and the French paper *Le Monde* published excerpts from it as indirect proof that the whole "Katyn Case" had been staged by propaganda, and could not be taken as anything else.

\* \* \* \* \*

I can personally remember the following scene in Katyn. Slovenchik had just heaved himself out of the largest of the mass graves, called the "L" grave because of its shape, and after dusting some of the sand off his police jackboots, spoke to me when we found ourselves alone together, after I had fled some distance from the sickening stink to which I had not yet accustomed myself.

"Well, sir, it's not a question of which side our sentiments are engaged upon in this case. You are a Pole and it must be unpleasant for you, probably even painful to see us make such a . . . well, such vulgar propaganda to forward our aims from something which for you is such a tragedy, but you will probably agree that we would be mad (*auf den Kopf gefallen*), once we struck on such a propaganda racket, not to make the most of it and not to use it as a political trump card!"

All the time I held a handkerchief to my nose and eyes so that he probably could not make out whether I

agreed or not to what he said. But frankly, I must admit that, from the German point of view, the thing was beyond argument. Anyone would have taken advantage of such a situation.

But the Soviet Government, as has already been told, two days later parried the blow by announcing that the Germans had committed the crime. From then on, the Nazis were to cross swords with the Bolsheviki in a symbolical and macabre duel fought over the piles of bodies of the murdered Polish officers.

\* \* \* \* \*

On the third day the Germans made a master stroke by inviting the International Red Cross to arbitrate. Once again the Bolsheviki countered, by paralysing the decision of the Geneva Institution. The Germans retaliated by appointing an "International Commission of Medical-Legal Experts from European Universities," which arrived at Smolensk on the 28th of April.

But this last German move was much weakened by the fact that, except for Professor Naville, Professor of Criminology at Geneva, all the experts came from countries either occupied or under the direct political influence of Germany. On the other hand, its authority gained from the fact that the Germans had previously made a request to an institution which was both international and absolutely independent.

The Commission was composed of the following members :

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| 1. Belgium.  | Dr. Speleers, Professor of Ophthalmology at the University of Ghent.       |
| 2. Denmark.  | Dr. Tramsen, Lecturer in the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Copenhagen. |
| 3. Bulgaria. | Dr. Markov, Reader of Forensic Medicine in Sofia University.               |

4. Finland. Dr. Saxon, Professor of Pathological Anatomy in Helsinki.
5. Italy. Dr. Palmieri, Professor of Forensic Medicine in Naples University.
6. Croatia. Dr. Miloslavich, Professor of Forensic Medicine in Zagreb University.
7. Holland. Dr. de Burlet, Professor of Anatomy in Groningen University.
8. Protectorate of Bohemia. Dr. Hajek, Professor of Forensic Medicine in Prague.
9. Rumania. Dr. Birkle, Consultant to the Rumanian Ministry of Justice and first assistant in the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Bucharest.
10. Switzerland. Dr. Naville, Professor of Forensic Medicine in Geneva University.
11. Slovakia. Dr. Subik, Professor of Pathological Anatomy at Pressburg University and Head of the Slovakian State Health Service.
12. Hungary. Dr. Orsos, Professor of Forensic Medicine in Budapest University.

The Commission was also assisted at its meetings and proceedings by the following :

1. Dr. Buhtz, Professor of Forensic Medicine in the University of Breslau, entrusted by the Supreme Command of the German Army with the direction of the excavation works at Katyn.
2. Medical Inspector Dr. Costedoat, entrusted by the Head of the French Government in Vichy to be present at the proceedings of the Commission.

On the 31st of April, 1943, the members of the Commission signed at Smolensk an expert statement, and during the first days of May they issued a communiqué containing a detailed report of examinations conducted in Katyn.

This report, on the whole, confirms the details already known from the German revelations, the evidence of the witnesses, the state of preservation of the bodies, the state in which the uniforms were found, which established beyond doubt that the murdered men were Polish officers, details of the numerous documents, letters, notes and newspapers, etc., found in their pockets. A few of the details included in the Commission's Report are worth stressing.

The Commission never mentioned a word as to the probable total of bodies discovered in Katyn, either as an affirmative to the German statement or in the form of a hypothetical estimate. We know that German propaganda had first claimed that there were 10,000 bodies, and afterwards from ten to twelve thousand. Only the estimate which referred to the amount of bodies in the largest "L" grave, originally calculated by the Germans at 3,000, was afterwards reduced by the Commission to 2,500.

The Commission found that the bodies were in varying states of decomposition, and its final summing up only confirmed the fact that at the present stage of development of medical jurisprudence it was difficult to establish with any certainty the exact date of death, judging only by the condition of the corpses. It was most interesting that the Commission included in its report the discovery and observations made by Professor Orsos from Budapest. According to the opinion of this experienced specialist, human skulls buried in the earth undergo a reaction consisting in the formation of several strata of a calcareous tufa-like incrustation on the surface of the brain, after the latter had already turned to a clayey consistency. This process can only take place if the skulls have been buried for over three years. The skulls dug up in Katyn showed signs of this transformation.

The body of an officer was examined. According to the insignia on the uniform it was the body of a lieu-

tenant. All that was found on him were two letters concealed in his breast, a photograph of a woman and a medallion of the Blessed Virgin. His name could not be discovered, because the letters were without envelopes. "Dearest" . . . began one of the letters, but further on the paper had been rotted by the cadaverous liquid which had seeped through. And so the body had to remain without even knowledge of its Christian name . . . It was nothing but Body No. 526 . . .

It was this body which had aroused the interest of Professor Orsos. Skull No. 526—the skull of a human being who was "Dearest" to somebody—now lies on the examination table. A Hungarian scientist, wearing rubber gloves and armed with a lancet, has picked it up and turns it this way and that. Such a simple performance. It happens daily in hundreds of dissecting rooms throughout the world and has often been abused in literary comparison. The scientist explains to the Commission's members the result of his observations. No. 526 distinctly shows traces of that change in the substance of the brain which can only occur in a skull which has lain in the ground for more than three years. No. 526 was killed by this shot here, of which we can see the entrance hole in the back of the skull at the base of the occiput, not later than 1940.

In 1940, in the neighbourhood of Smolensk, none could have done it but the Bolsheviks.

Another point which the Commission asserts categorically is that the "clotting together of the neighbouring bodies by dense putrefaction, and, in particular, the deformation due to pressure, point decisively to the fact that *this is the original grave.*" The Commission unanimously accepted the year 1940 as the date of the crime.

As to this last conclusion, it is necessary to mention what happened at the Nuremberg Trials. The Soviet Prosecutor presented to the Court as its witness, Dr. Markov from Sofia, one of the members of the Com-

mission called by the Germans in 1943. Dr. Markov was brought from Soviet-occupied Bulgaria. His evidence created the effect that the Commission of Experts of which he had been a member had issued its report under pressure by the Germans. On the 2nd of July, 1946, press agencies sent the following news from Nuremberg :

One of the members of the so-called International Commission called by the Germans to investigate the Katyn crime, told the War Crimes Tribunal that the Commission was forced to sign a report absolving Germany of the Katyn Forest murder, after having landed on a lonely airfield, surrounded by German soldiers.

The witness, M. A. Markov, a Bulgarian expert on the Commission, told the Tribunal about how the Germans, using "psychological" pressure, forced the Commission's members to sign documents that they had never had time to read, much less write.

Markov was called as a witness for the prosecution, by the Russians, in order to prove that it was not the Soviet authorities but the Germans who had murdered the eleven thousand Polish officers in the neighbourhood of Smolensk.

He testified furthermore that he had been "drafted" from the University of Sofia to serve with the Commission composed of scientists from other satellite countries. He said that the Commission was allowed to examine only eight bodies in two days and was next sent back to Berlin. The documents on the Commission's "findings" had been produced during a stop at a lonely airport en route to Berlin, and it was there that the Members of the Commission were compelled to sign them. The signed documents said that the scientists had decided that the bodies of the Poles in Katyn had been buried for at least three years



and thus had been killed before the Germans entered the Katyn area near Smolensk. All the members of the Commission had signed although they had not come to any conclusions. "I had not the courage to refuse my signature," stated the witness, "although in my opinion the alleged date of death did not conform with the truth."

All Dr. Markov's evidence at the Nuremberg Trial is untrue. It was denied by the other members of the Commission, but their denials were only in private conversation. None of them were asked to give evidence before the War Crimes Tribunal. No one asked them to corroborate Dr. Markov's statements. There seems no doubt that Dr. Markov himself would not have told that story if he had not been obliged to do it under strong pressure exercised by . . .

To those acquainted with Soviet methods, the story is plain from the start. But it was only a year and a half later, in January, 1947; that the question was finally elucidated. This is what happened.

As already stated, Dr. Francis Naville, Professor of Forensic Medicine at Geneva University, had been a member of that Commission of Experts. His authority, his age and professional fame in addition to the fact that he represented a neutral country, leave no doubt as to his impartiality. That in itself was sufficient to cause uneasiness to those whose interest lay in the concealment of the truth. That is why, not only was he never called as a witness before the Nuremberg Tribunal, but he also became a victim of bitter attacks launched by Swiss Communists through the medium of the so-called "Swiss Labour Party." Efforts were made to undermine his authority by means of an interpellation sent to the Grand Council of the Geneva Canton on his taking part in the Commission of Experts. In answer to the charge, Professor Naville issued a long and detailed report which

was read at the meeting of the Grand Council on the 17th of January, 1947. In this Professor Naville fully supported the conclusions accepted by the Commission in 1943, and explained the underlying factors and other circumstances in relation to the whole case. He stated :

I can give assurance that our examinations were conducted in complete freedom. I never noticed the slightest sign of pressure either towards myself or any other of the Commission's members. We discussed our observations amongst ourselves in the absence of any German. I was allowed to move freely in Katyn and in Berlin, unaccompanied and without a guide of any sort. Due to the fact that two of the Commission's members spoke Russian I was able to talk many times through their intermediacy with the local peasants and Russian prisoners.

In complete freedom, we personally carried out the post-mortem examination of ten bodies which, on our own instructions, were dug out of the graves in our presence, from the lower layers in an untouched part of the grave-pit. We dictated the results of these autopsies, also in absolute freedom and without any intervention on the part of the German Medical Officers. We also examined in absolute freedom about a hundred bodies from among those which were dragged out of the graves in our presence. I myself discovered in the pocket of one of the bodies a wooden cigarette case with an inscription "Kozielsk" carved in the wood, while from another uniform I pulled out a box of matches made by a Russian factory situated in the district of Orel.

All the experts present there, assembled on Friday afternoon, the 30th of April, 1943, in order to discuss and settle upon the text of our report. In the discussion, carried out in absolute freedom, only medical experts took part. The final text of the report was

worked out by a few chosen from among us, and I received the text for approval and signature on the 1st of May, at about 3 a.m. I made a few annotations and requested a few small changes and corrections which were immediately inserted. I do not remember Dr. Markov raising any objections during our discussions. But I was present at the time of his signing the drafted protocol and I can testify that he raised no objections then. Neither was he pressed nor influenced by anyone while performing his work with the Commission. As a matter of fact, he personally conducted the post-mortem of the body No. 827, in our presence, and he personally dictated his observations to the protocol, a copy of which is in my possession.

After Professor Naville had read his report to the Grand Council, the Chairman of the Cantonal Government declared in the name of his Government that Professor Naville's action was quite in conformity with the ethics of his profession, and perfectly honourable, and his report clarified and explained the conclusions which he had signed in his previous report of 1943. At the end, the Chairman expressed his own opinion thus :

If it be true that Dr. Markov was compelled by pressure in his actions, it remains a question whether this pressure was exercised by German bayonets three years ago—or whether it is pressure exercised now by . . . Soviet bayonets.

The statement of Professor Naville is clear, it inspires confidence and its truth can be at any moment confirmed by the other members of the Commission who happen to be beyond the reach of the Soviet authorities. In spite of this, neither public opinion, nor still less the Allied authorities have ever accepted the findings of the Commission as a definite solution of the Katyn crime.

That only one witness was called before the War Crimes Tribunal, out of all the members of the Commission of Experts—and he the only one to attempt to undermine its authority and the value of his own signature—shows how biassed was the attitude adopted towards the findings of the Commission.

Because of this, the Commission failed in its purpose of convincing the world, and the counter-offensive of Soviet propaganda left a great question mark in the poisoned air above the disturbed graves. A sinister question mark it was, not quite alike to the usual printed sign, because the dot beneath it seemed to be caused by the blood with which it dripped.

## XII

### THE FIGHT OVER THE THIRD QUESTION

WHILE exploiting the terrible Katyn crime for their own propaganda aims and spreading the news of it throughout the world, the Germans were definitely aware that three most important questions had to be answered before the world would accept their version. The three questions were :

1. Who were the murdered men ?
2. How many were murdered ?
3. When were they murdered ?

The answer to the first question, namely that the murdered men were Polish officers, was so obvious that it was never contested by either side or by any one else in the world, either at the time of discovery or later on.

To the second question—"How many?"—the Germans answered: "About ten to twelve thousand." This estimate roughly corresponded to the number of missing Polish prisoners for which the Polish Government had been searching. This figure was not questioned by the Soviet side.

The third question—"When?"—was tantamount to answering the most important question of all. *Who* had murdered them ? There could be no doubt whatsoever that such a mass slaughter could not be committed by an individual nor as an act of private vengeance ; it could only be carried out by order of the State. The murder had been committed upon territory which had passed from the occupation of one State to another. As

soon as the date of the crime was established, it automatically proved which of the two States was guilty. As Soviet Russia had categorically denied her guilt and threw the responsibility on the Germans, the answer to the third question became the only real controversy. The entire discussion was concentrated upon this, and the Germans focussed all their attention on it. Most of the details published by their official propaganda referred to that third question.

On the 22nd of April, 1943, that is two days before the arrival of the International Commission, Ludwig Voss, the secretary of the German Secret Field Police (*Geheime Feld Polizei*) testified before the Judge, Dr. Conrad. There was also present a functionary of the Legal Branch of the German Army, Bornemann. His statement could be summed up as follows :

The first news about the existence of mass graves in Katyn Wood dated from the beginning of February, 1943.

The existence of mounds in Katyn Wood was, in fact, established and after closer examination it was ascertained that these mounds were artificial and that the little pine trees which grew upon them were also artificially planted. Tentative digging, undertaken during the frosty weather in February, revealed that these were in fact mass graves.

Because of the frost, exhumation works on a larger scale could not be carried out.

For the purpose of establishing the details, local inhabitants were questioned and a search was made for witnesses.

On orders of OKH (*Oberkommando des Heeres*, Supreme Army Command) systematic examinations of the first grave began on the 29th of March, 1943. Up till now 600 corpses have been identified. There are about 3,000 bodies in the first of the mass graves.

In other graves located in the closest proximity, there ought to be a further five to six thousand bodies, according to a rough estimate.

Identifications hitherto carried out leave no doubt that practically all the bodies are those of Polish officers.

Notes in diaries and notebooks found on the bodies all end with dates between the 6th and the 20th of April, 1940.

In this statement, Voss, on the whole, confirms the dates and other details given in earlier communiqués. What is new in his evidence, and contrary to the official German version, is his estimate of the total number of the murdered men. He speaks of about nine thousand at the very most. Neither German propaganda nor public opinion seemed to have noticed this, and neither made any comment. If, for example, there were only 2,500 bodies in the first grave (the approximate capacity established by the Commission of Experts) this added to the lower figure given in Voss's estimate, would only have added up to a total of 7,500 bodies. This estimate is in great disproportion to the highest number claimed by official propaganda. The difference was striking, and also the fact that the second estimate came from a Government functionary directly engaged in the exhumation works. How was it that Goebbels claimed twelve thousand bodies and Ludwig Voss dared to say there could be no more than eight thousand at the most? Was it not even more curious that Soviet propaganda, so anxious to find any flaw in the German evidence, overlooked this first serious contradiction in the German report?

Perhaps in the heated struggle over the third question, which was the most important, both sides neglected the importance of the second one? Or were there special reasons for not raising it? If so—what were these

reasons? Could the answer to the second question—how many bodies?—throw any light on the third question—when they were murdered?—which of course meant by *whom*? But at that time, no one seemed to think so.

The German propaganda gained in strength with every day. It became known that before the Germans broke the news to the world on the 13th of April, 1943, they brought a Polish delegation to Katyn from German-occupied Warsaw and Cracow. This delegation included, among others, representatives of the Polish Mutual Relief Organization (R.G.O.), Mr. Seyfried, Dr. K. Orzechowski, Dr. E. Grodzki and K. Prochownik. These arrived at Smolensk on the 10th of April. The Germans allowed them to make free investigations in both of the graves which had been already opened, and to examine all the documents which had been discovered, letters, diaries, etc. They were allowed to contact the local people and freely talk to those working there. As a result of these investigations, the delegates came to the conclusion that the crime could not have been committed later than April, 1940.

A few days later another Polish delegation was brought to Katyn, this time of technical experts, though their number included the Rev. Father S. Jasienski, Canon of Cracow and confidential emissary of Prince Sapieha, Archbishop of Cracow, and an editor, Marjan Martens. But the rest of the group were doctors and delegates of the Polish Red Cross. They were: Dr. A. Szebesta, Dr. T. Susz-Praglowski, Dr. Bartoszewski, S. Klapert, J. Skarzynski, L. Jarkiewicz, J. Wodzinowski, S. Kolo-dziejski, Z. Bohowski and R. Banach. Some of these remained in Katyn and took active part in the exhumation work. This delegation, after inspecting the documents and hearing the evidence of the witnesses, also came to the conclusion that the murder was not committed later than the spring of 1940.



At the same time, there was an excursion of foreign journalists from Berlin, which included as well as those from German-occupied countries, Mr. Jaederlund, correspondent of the Swedish *Stockholms Tidningen*, Mr. Schnetzer, correspondent of the *Bund* of Switzerland, and Mr. Sanchez, correspondent of the Spanish *Informations*. These were accompanied by Councillor Schippert, a representative of the Press Department in the Reich Chancellery and by Mr. Lassler, a Secretary of Legation.

At that time, nobody discussed the possible number of victims. The graves had scarcely been touched as yet, and the total approximate surface of apparent graves seemed to confirm the German estimate of ten to twelve thousand. The foreign journalists, after studying all the evidence, also came to the conclusion that the murder could not have been committed later than the spring of 1940. They raised, however, an entirely new question.

"If the Bolsheviks did it, why did they leave so many compromising documents and other objects upon their victims, who had apparently been stripped of valuables?"

"Because," answered Colonel von Gersdorff, who acted as their guide, "in 1940 they never believed that their enemies could occupy Smolensk and neighbourhood, and dig up and identify these bodies."

The journalists remained silent as if convinced by the argument. Further questions would hardly have been tactful. Because they remembered very well that in 1940 Hitler and Stalin were the closest friends and allies . . . And so to change the subject, they asked if they might witness the opening of a grave untouched as yet. Their wish was fulfilled and all those present watched the digging up of a fresh mound. They were satisfied that the layer of corpses pressed together and stuck as if by glue proved that this grave could not have been touched since it was originally filled. Then suddenly—

It was a startling revelation. All of a sudden one of the correspondents pointed to a corpse and all eyes were turned to it.

A woman ! ! !

Yes, it was the body of a woman, amongst that mass of men's bodies. For an unexplained reason all the journalists took off their hats though they had not thought to accord that homage to the thousands of murdered men. The Russian prisoners employed at the digging also stopped their work and peered curiously into the grave. A heavy silence fell, only broken by the sound of the wind as it blew, chasing the clouds and bringing the warmth of spring from the south to this chilly country. The tap ! tap ! of a woodpecker could be heard from a nearby tree. A flutter of excitement broke out amongst the journalists, but the Germans remained silent in blank astonishment. At last, one of them broke away from the group and hurried to the field telephone in a neighbouring hut. That evening they tried to turn the discovery into a mere bagatelle and draw the attention of the correspondents to other things.

But in truth, the German authorities were taken aback and extremely worried by the discovery of a woman's body in the Katyn graves. They were so worried that they decided to conceal the fact and never mentioned it officially. They were afraid that the utter improbability of a female body being found in a mass grave supposed to contain the bodies of Polish officers, without any clue to how it got there, would cast new doubts and undermine the authority of their version of the discoveries, which until now had seemed to fit the facts so wonderfully. They would have to issue a commentary which they were unable to supply. In fact, though the Germans did not know and could not possibly have known, there was one woman, a flight-lieutenant of the Polish Air Force, in the camp at Kozielsk, and therefore the discovery of her body did not undermine the German

version.<sup>1</sup> On the contrary, it confirmed the facts only known to the Polish authorities.

Yet one other detail was passed over in silence by German propaganda. A very important detail indeed and whispered everywhere, although not mentioned aloud. What had happened to the cartridge cases? Where had they disappeared? Surely it could be discovered of what make they were, and thereby their country of manufacture?

The calibre of the pistols used was known. It was 6.65. But of *what* make was the ammunition? Of course it is possible that the murderers removed the cartridges. But with so many thousand shots fired, it is highly improbable that a few cartridge cases were not overlooked. Surely the experts could come to some conclusion as many of the bullets must have remained in the skulls of their victims? But the Germans remained obstinately silent on the subject of the ammunition.

What is even more astonishing is that this striking German omission had apparently passed unnoticed by the ever-watchful Soviet propaganda. Why did not the Russians raise the question of the cartridge cases?

Further visits of press correspondents took place to Katyn. The Germans dragged people from all over Europe to show them the graves. They brought prisoner-of-war British and American officers and even a group of Polish officers. They endeavoured to forge a new weapon for their propaganda by trying to persuade those Polish officers to deliver lectures and speeches which could be recorded on gramophone records and broadcast. But the Polish officers refused and stated the conditions upon which they would agree to visit the place of the crime.

<sup>1</sup> It was the body of Mrs. Janina Lewandowska, born in 1910 and the daughter of a famous Polish General, Dowbor-Musnicki. She was the wife of Colonel Lewandowski and she was on active service in the Polish Air Force. She was shot down by the Red Army in September, 1939, and that is how she found herself a prisoner in Russian hands.

These conditions were: no speeches, no interviews and no names published. The Germans agreed, and what is even more extraordinary they strictly kept their promise.

The Polish officers were brought to Katyn in April. They assumed that the whole surface before them was one enormous grave. They measured the dimensions and depth and came to the conclusion that the German estimate of ten to twelve thousand was probably correct. Flight-Lieut. Rowinski even made a rough sketch of the supposed common grave. The Germans allowed them complete initiative and freedom of movement, allowing them to inspect both bodies and documents and talk to the witnesses. One of the officers, a skilled forester, entered the grave at a place where an old pine tree grew close to the edge of the pit. He noticed that the roots of this tree had let out new shoots which had grown right into the clotted mass of bodies. He cut one such stem and after examining it thoroughly, declared: "There can be no doubt. This root is at least three years old. Which means 1940 . . ."

The members of these different excursions to Katyn were allowed to study the evidence of the witnesses, mostly local inhabitants. Such statements were mostly taken at the end of February and some at the beginning of April, 1943. The story of Kosogory Hill in Katyn wood was related by Kuzma Godunov, Ivan Krivozhertsov and Michael Shigulov.

They testified that the hillock was known to be a place of execution ever since 1918. Executions were carried out there by the famous *Cheka*. In 1931, the place was surrounded by a fence and special posters warned the local population not to enter. From 1940, Kosogory was closely guarded by watchmen with watch-dogs.

As to the transports which brought the prisoners to Katyn in 1940, and about their liquidation, evidence was given by the same Krivozhertsov and by Maciej

Zacharov, Gregor Sylvestrov, Ivan Andreyev and Partemon Kisielev.

In March and April, 1940, Krivozhertsov saw the transports arriving daily at the station of Gniezdovo, consisting of three or four railway coaches with barred windows.

Zacharov, who worked at that time at Smolensk railway station, also saw these wagons with prisoners of war. The prisoners were in Polish uniforms. The transports with prisoners left Smolensk in the direction of Gniezdovo. They were sent there daily for 28 days.

Sylvestrov saw the wagons arriving at Gniezdovo station and the prisoners being unloaded. Their kit bags were taken from them and thrown on to a special lorry, while the prisoners themselves were loaded into three prison cars which drove away in the direction of Katyn wood. The cars would often make ten journeys a day between the summer rest-house in Kosogory and Gniezdovo station.

Andreyev also saw the transports with prisoners arriving, during March and April, 1940, at Gniezdovo station. They were Polish soldiers judging by the shapes of their caps. They were transferred to cars, and driven off to Katyn.

Kisielev related the details of how he showed the place where the executions were carried out, to the Polish workers in 1942.

Many of the Polish officers whom the Germans brought to Katyn could speak Russian fluently, and they could communicate freely with these witnesses without the need of an interpreter.

The statements of the witnesses who maintained that Kosogory had been a place of execution long before the war, were easily verified. Places pointed out by the witnesses, the Germans ordered to be dug up. Eleven graves were in fact found. They no longer formed mounds but slight hollows and the surface soil had long

since become similar to its surroundings. In these hollows, bodies in civilian clothes had been found. There were not many of them, fewer than a hundred. But all of them revealed the same cause of death, a shot in the base of the occiput. The state of decomposition of the bodies varied, which pointed to the fact that they must have been executed in different years, before the war.

That was the true state of affairs taking place in Katyn wood, a locality whose existence was unknown to most of the world which now learned that it was situated sixteen kilometres from Smolensk and four from Gniezdovo railway station, that it was covered with pine trees, and the river Dniepr washed its steep wooded banks, above which stood a Russian *datcha* which served as a summer rest-house for NKVD functionaries, whose photographs caused some to shudder with horror, while others smiled in doubt as if they dismissed all these revelations.

The German-controlled broadcasting stations throughout Europe published daily some fresh detail about Katyn. The German "Transocean" transmitted them to the whole world.

To parry the charge brought, the Soviet propaganda mobilized all possible means. Moscow repeated obstinately: "The Polish officers were murdered by bands of Hitler's gangsters in August and September 1941!"

At the same time as this official Russian commentary (accepted without discussion by the broadcasting stations of the Allies), another action was taken by the Soviet sponsored underground organizations all over German-occupied Europe. This aimed at abolishing, undermining or causing confusion in the statements issued by the Germans, to raise doubts and suspicions as to their authenticity. The intense way this action was carried out, pointed to its central source. It found a fertile soil for growth, a soil which the Germans had cultivated

against themselves. The brutality of their methods, the mass murders in their concentration camps, gas chambers and crematory stoves, their sullen policy of extermination and the cynicism of the programme of "New Europe" under the shadow of the Nazi Swastika; all these things had mobilized exhausted Europe against them, long before the news of the terrible crime committed near Smolensk became known. People usually believe what they want to believe . . . Nobody wanted to believe in German propaganda. Even in Eastern Europe which had suffered so much under Soviet occupation, those other wounds were forgotten in the martyrdom suffered under German occupation.

But the Katyn murders were an atrocity of such dimension that it might have caused a change of opinion if the German policy could be intelligent enough to change its methods with the subjugated peoples of Europe. Fearing such a possibility, the agents of Soviet propaganda doubled their efforts and, never very fastidious in their choice of method, used every possible device to turn public opinion against the German version. The most improbable news items were circulated, which often not only contradicted each other but also the official Russian view—all with the purpose of sowing doubts and causing confusion, which would, in the end, undermine confidence in the results published by Germans of the Katyn investigations.

\* \* \* \* \*

I remember an April day, as warm as if it were already midsummer, when a man from a neighbouring village called upon me. We sat on the little verandah of my house, and true to his calling of farmer, he talked to me about the weather. When the conversation turned to that topic which was unavoidable just then, he suddenly asked: "Can it be true what people say, that the Germans approach all families of whom they have heard to

have a relative in Kozielsk camp, and after having written down the particulars, they publish the name of that person on the list of alleged victims in Katyn wood? While in truth"—he waved his hand towards the east—"there are no graves at all, over there . . ."

"Who told you that?"

"Oh, well . . . That's what people say . . ."

Another time people said that bodies were brought to Katyn from the concentration camp at Auschwitz and that they were clad in Polish uniforms there and . . .

A third version was that the Germans had shot these men, but they were Russian prisoners of war. According to a fourth version, all those shot in Katyn were Jews.

It must be stressed that all these rumours contradicted not only the German but equally the Soviet official version. But the latter was little known in territories under German occupation because of the confiscation of all wireless sets, and anyhow it was scarcely suitable for propaganda in Poland . . . Too fresh, there, were the memories of what the Bolsheviks were capable of doing, and further—there were the letters! Why, if the Kozielsk prisoners were really living in the neighbourhood of Smolensk until August, 1941, had all news from them stopped precisely in the spring of 1940?

No! People shook their heads and began again to listen to the more probable German story.

But the Soviet agents were clever enough not to reveal themselves as such. They were instructed to infiltrate into the national underground organizations. Therein, it was far easier to act. They especially infiltrated the resistance movements of those countries which bordered Soviet Russia and, in the imperialistic plans of the Soviet Union, were to be annexed after victory.

One Sunday, I heard the news that my school friend, Captain Konstanty Anton of the 4th Lancers, and a former prisoner of Kozielsk, whose name had appeared on the list of Katyn victims—was alive!



"But of course, he's alive!" I was told. "Go and find out for yourself if you don't believe. His wife received a letter from him by way of Turkey. He's in the Polish Army in the Near East." A week later, everybody in the neighbourhood was talking about this. Even I—though initially sceptical because I had seen for myself the thoroughness of the identification procedure in Katyn—even I wavered in view of the obstinacy with which everybody maintained that Anton was alive. I assumed that he had changed documents with another prisoner, and might really be alive. But nobody—not even I—ever thought of going to his wife, and asking her if she had really received such a letter. To spread such a rumour openly proved that whoever did it had sound knowledge of human psychology. The Bolsheviks had this knowledge . . . Everyone would repeat such news, but no one would verify it. I did verify it, but three years later, in Italy. There I learned that Captain Anton had vanished without trace from Kozielsk in 1940. He was never in the Polish Army in the East, and his wife could never have received a letter from him, sent via Turkey.

Another rumour was circulated in Warsaw. "A certain lady read on the list of the Katyn victims the name of her own husband who had been arrested by the Germans and sent to Auschwitz concentration camp. And so she went ('The fool!') to the Gestapo . . . and never returned!" That was a clever one! Nobody could verify whether it was true because—she never returned. And although nobody knew the name or address of the alleged lady, this mythical event spread all over Poland and was repeated from mouth to mouth as "absolutely certain!" Of course it was untrue, because after the ultimate verification of the lists of the Katyn victims, it was confirmed that not a single one had ever been seen since the spring of 1940.

But such rumours achieved their aim. Not only

throughout the world, but even in Poland, where people had far more reason to believe the true version, there was still no certainty as to the actual fate of the missing prisoners.

### XIII

## MY DISCOVERY IN KATYN

**I**N the second half of April of the critical year 1943, I still lived in the country, about seven miles from Wilno. I seldom visited the city, and then only on foot. During the Soviet occupation, I had given up my profession of writer and journalist, and I took a more appropriate job—that of wagon driver. From the time the Germans took over, I remained quietly in the country, and somehow managed to remain undisturbed although the German authorities undoubtedly knew of my whereabouts.

It must have been about a week before Easter that I ventured on a trip to Wilno, in order to sell an old summer coat. In the market square, I ran into a former acquaintance of mine. He was now working as a sales-agent in the office of a newspaper printed in Polish by the Germans, and because of this he had useful contacts and often some first-hand information.

The weather was warm. Springtime . . . A southern wind had raised the quicksilver in the thermometers. People left their winter coats at home, but they also left behind that hope—the hope of a speedy end of their sufferings—to which they had clung with the coming of every previous spring. At this time, everyone was preoccupied with the news of the dreadful crime so recently discovered near Smolensk. Apart from that, life just drifted on, in discouragement and hunger, dragging along its misery and apathy. But my friend's face lit up in excitement at our encounter. He grabbed me by one of my coat buttons and spluttered in an excited whisper :

"Since yesterday, Klau has been ringing incessantly . . . Werner Klau, the head of the Press-office attached to the Gebietskommissariat Vilna-Stadt. He asks whether someone in the office knows your address. They want you to go to Katyn!"

Anyone who has been in touch with the Underground Movement, during the reign of the Gestapo, knows how difficult it was to establish contact, and how much time was often wasted in waiting for instructions. From his words, I immediately understood that it was a case of great importance, and that I could not take a decision without first getting the consent of the Underground authorities.

"Some news that!" I said, reaching a decision. "I wonder if you could undertake to inform Klau that you will personally find out my address, but that it will take you about three days? I don't want him to search for me through his own channels. In the meantime, I shall—"

"Of course! I understand."

"Jadzia," as usual, was unattainable. She was my liaison with the Second-in-Command of the Military Underground Organization, and in the little restaurant where she ought to have been, the only information as to her whereabouts I could get was a shrug of the shoulders. I tried "Roman," a type-setter of the Underground paper with whom I was in touch, but he could not promise me an immediate contact.

"I'll try," was all I could get from him.

"Zygmunt," who stood much higher in the conspiracy, was too exposed, and was under observation at this time, which meant that he had to be as cautious as possible. As a matter of fact, he was not cautious enough with the result that three months later he hanged himself with his own socks in the cell of the Gestapo's Prison, not being able to withstand the tortures he was put through during the enquiry.

These details have no direct bearing on the Katyn crime which is the subject of this book, but they illustrate both the great and the small difficulties which in all that confusion barred the way to the truth. After three days of repeated effort, I found that the "Commander" was away and I could only get hold of his second-in-command. Before the latter had given his decision—"Go!"—two more days had slipped away, and so it was only on the afternoon of the sixth day that I found myself invited to sit down in the comfortable armchair behind the desk of the Head of the German Press-office.

Werner Klau, himself a former Berlin journalist, was very polite. No pledges, no signatures, no compulsion, no statement, simply :

"You will go and see for yourself . . . "

But anyone who took for granted that the German administration was an efficient machine would have been wrong. Every totalitarian system is bound to choke itself with its own red tape. It complicates the simplest happening. My case took more than three weeks of a roundabout correspondence between the Ostministerium and Berlin, the Oberkommando and the Gestapo. I just waited . . .

In the meantime I managed to contact Dr. Sengalewicz, a former professor at Wilno University and the greatest Polish authority in the field of medical jurisprudence. I wanted him to instruct me and prepare me in theory for what I was about to see with my own eyes.

The scholar pulled down a pile of volumes from his bookshelves. He showed me illustrations, and explained and commented on the news published in the German papers about the condition of the bodies found at Katyn.

"If the soil is really a mixture of sand and clay it makes it possible that the bodies are well preserved. It forms what is scientifically called 'adipocere.' At first sight, I see no contradictions or puzzles in the Ger-

man communiqués. Ah, there's an important thing : according to the German newspapers, at the head of the exhumation works and in charge of the whole enquiry is Professor Buhtz from Breslau University. It so happens that we were friends at school. I can assure you that, first of all, he is a scholar of European fame on the subject, and secondly that his honesty is beyond all doubt. Under no circumstances would he sign a false statement as an expert witness. You can talk to him, and mention my name as a reference."

"Thanks. Anything else worth noting?"

"Oh, of course ! Try and find out about the cartridge cases. There's no mention of them in the papers, which strikes me as tricky."

"Yes, I thought that too. If the actual make of the ammunition used in the murder could be discovered, it would explain so much."

"Exactly. The examination of the cartridge cases is an elementary step in any enquiry following a murder committed by fire-arms. I can't understand why it hasn't been mentioned."

And so it was not until the latter half of May, 1943, that I found myself in a German " Ju 88," an out-of-date type of plane. With me were three reporters, two Portuguese and one Swede, and a group of ten factory workers from Warsaw, sent by the Germans to see for themselves, and spread the news to their countrymen. It was a propaganda trick which had been practised for a long time now by the Nazis. Accompanying us was a Wehrmacht officer, a former Military Attaché in Tokyo, now a liaison officer with the German Foreign Office. We groped our way through clouds heavy with snow, rain and hail. It had become very cold again. The wind had turned to North-East and blew straight against the blunt nose of the plane. The journey over a country desolated by war seemed very long. We had to be careful, for as we neared the front line, Soviet

fighters might have been on the prowl. The machine was meant to transport parachute troops and the seats were very uncomfortable. We felt air-sick. When we landed by the banks of the river Dniepr, in a drizzle, it was scarcely five degrees above freezing point.

"Good enough," commented our German guide.

"Why good?"

"You couldn't stand the air round the Katyn graves if it were warmer . . ."

Everything there was of a rusty red colour—the clay and bricks from the shattered houses, the rusty skeletons of tanks and guns and army vehicles scattered about—all the usual decay which follows and surrounds every war. There were very few civilians and those in sight looked shabby and scared. I knew the conditions of Soviet life and I was not surprised that the inhabitants of Smolensk spoke as little as possible, preferring to shrug their shoulders. But it surprised the foreign correspondents.

"How is it possible? Do you mean to say that here in Smolensk, scarcely ten miles from the scene of that mass crime, they have heard nothing of it?"

The citizen of Smolensk stood reluctant, and kept his eyes on the ground, littered with broken glass and rubble from the ruins of his own house and those of his friends. He kept his thoughts to himself.

I tried to smile, feeling somehow embarrassed as if I too were to blame for the state of affairs in Eastern Europe. The Russian raised his eyes, and as if he understood my expression, the ghost of a smile flickered over his face. A pale smile, as pale as the cloudy sky which overhung this country.

On the railway running westwards from Smolensk to Vitebsk lay the station of Gniezdovo. Parallel with it was a hard-surfaced road. It was to this station that the Polish prisoners of war were brought in 1940. This is beyond all doubt, and has never been questioned

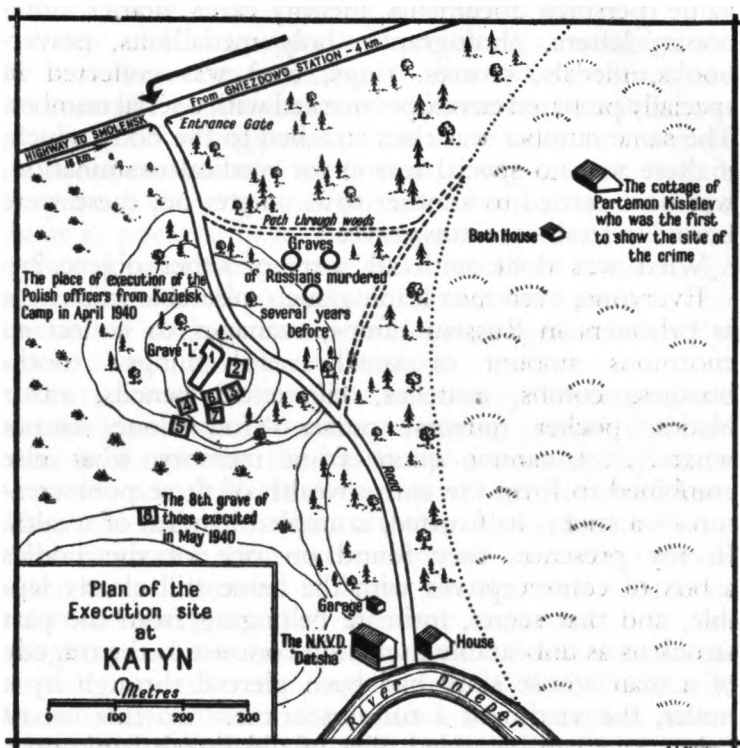
by either side. The road led past the station towards Katyn, which lies about two miles from Gniezdovo. On both sides of the road stretch marshy woods, partly cut down and replanted with small birch and alder trees. One's eyes wander indifferently over the wet leaves and branches and the slender stems of the thick brushwood. But imagination drives one's thoughts, as if in rhythm with the revolving wheels, down this road—"this way, this way, this way . . . were driven these men . . ."

The sudden grinding of brakes and we slowed down at a gate. Barbed wire cut across the runaway path of imagination. Everything becomes poignantly real. The gendarme with a tin plate on his breast, the drizzling rain, the dripping pine trees. A bird is pleading for the spring, somewhere near. "Tit-pi-tit." And above all, the ghastly, suffocating, cadaverous stink.

At the time of my arrival at Katyn, all the seven mass-graves had been opened and some of them had even been emptied. In others, the work of exhumation was still proceeding, though this too was nearing its end. The first thing which struck me was the amount of litter strewn all over the forest around the empty graves. Later on, I found the reason for it, and that was what brought me to my most important discovery.

To stress it more vividly, it is necessary to describe the method of the exhumation works. The Germans supervised the general works, but the actual labour was directed by members of the Polish Red Cross team, previously mentioned, headed by Dr. Wodzinski from Cracow. He had at his disposal volunteer workers from local villages and an allotted group of Russian prisoners of war. The bodies were hauled out of the death pit and deposited in rows at the side. They were next taken, one by one, inspected and thoroughly searched. The uniforms were still in quite a good state and it was possible to discern the cloth of which they





were made, except that the colour had faded. All leather articles, including boots, looked at first sight as if they were made of rubber. As everything was soaked and glued with a most loathsome, stinking and gummy cadaverous liquid, it was impossible to unbutton the pockets or pull off the boots. It was therefore necessary to cut them with knives in order to find the personal belongings. This was done by special workers under the supervision of a Red Cross delegate. Everything found was inspected. Anything which was of any value as evidence, as a souvenir for the family, as a help to identify the body, or which had any material

value (personal documents, identity cards, diaries, notebooks, letters, photographs, holy medallions, prayer-books, medals, crosses, rings, etc.) was collected in specially prepared envelopes marked with a serial number. The same number was then attached to the body which, if there was no special reason for medical examination, was next carried to another row. Later on, these were buried in fresh common graves.

What was done with all sorts of other objects?

Everyone, even men leading such miserable existences as prisoners in Russian camps, manages to collect an enormous amount of small useful things: tooth-brushes, combs, matches, cigarettes, pencils, razor blades, pocket mirrors, purses—God alone knows what . . . I cannot quote from memory what else combined to form the entire wealth of these poor creatures—a sticky, half-rotted, crumpled handful of wealth. In my presence, they found on one of the bodies a box of contraceptives with the name still clearly legible, and that secret, intimate belonging from the past struck us as unbearably human in contrast to the tragedy of a man whose skull had been pierced through by a bullet, the victim of a ruthless crime. To this list of belongings can be added piles of old Polish banknotes, no longer in circulation and quite valueless. Sometimes there were rolls of them. All these things were thrown away, into the wood, on the undergrowth of bilberries, moss, heather and whortleberries, under the juniper shrubs. But there was one other thing which was also thrown away—*newspapers*.

Although the International Commission of Experts, the later report written by Voss, the Secretary of the Geheime Polizei and the report of Dr. Buhtz, all drew attention to the dates of issue of the newspapers found on the bodies, they did not sufficiently stress the tremendous importance of these scraps of paper as evidence to help to solve the riddle.

If we know *when*—then we also know *who* . . .

A few of these papers were retained as exhibits but the rest were thrown away in the wood. But these were mostly scraps and small pieces, not whole newspapers. To a beggarly prisoner of war, newspapers are indispensable and serve many purposes, as wallets or purses, as wrapping for numerous things carried about in pockets, bags, and knapsacks; they may even replace cigarette-paper or make excellent wads to be put in shoes or even make substitutes for socks. The amount of such remnants of paper, together with the whole sheets, was overwhelming.

Oberleutnant Slovenchik, who served as our guide and took us round, made a sweeping gesture with his hand as if to cover the heather and the empty pits, as he told us: "Please yourselves, gentlemen. Anything you find here, you may take as a souvenir."

I went around, bent over as I poked with a bit of stick at the scraps saturated with the ghastly smell. At first, I also did not grasp their immense importance. It was only later, as I watched the inspection of different objects carried out under the supervision of Dr. Wodzinski, when in my presence they pulled the crumpled newspapers out of the pockets, and when the first and second . . . and the fifth . . . and the tenth . . . and every single one carried a date either of March or April, 1940—and not until then did the tremendous importance of this dawn upon me. *Głos Radziecki* ("The Voice of the Union"), a Soviet daily, printed in Polish, repeatedly turned up amongst a score of other papers in Russian. Having seen them, I can confirm the statement of Lieut. Mlynarski who had written of how this rag was sent to all the camps in Russia. As to the dates, there could be no doubt whatsoever. I must stress here that any newsprint was marvellously preserved in those graves. Some of the newspapers were completely legible and the letters stuck out like print on greasy parchment.

I returned to the wood, always holding a handkerchief to my nose. I tried to conceal a violent attack of sickness by hiding behind the trunk of an old pine. I then started again to poke amongst the scraps of paper scattered all over the undergrowth. Where I could not read the date, I read fragments of news, descriptions of facts which clearly referred to happenings which occurred in the first months of 1940. None were later.

"Which means there can be no doubt!"

I must have said it aloud, because one of the workers from Warsaw, also wandering about near by, straightened himself and asked: "What about?" I remember he was holding a thick roll of banknotes and seemed much preoccupied by them. I did not answer him, I was so absorbed with the ordering of my impressions.

These newspapers could not possibly have remained in the pockets of the murdered men for a year and a half, if—according to the Soviet version—they were still alive in August, 1941. A newspaper, even an enemy one, is a source of information for a prisoner which he eagerly reads. It would be absurd to keep old copies when, in time of war, important happenings occur daily. Ever since the outbreak of hostilities between Germany and Soviet Russia, every move in the campaign might have a direct bearing on the lives of these men. Oh, but what is the use of arguing? It is all plain nonsense and that's the end of it! Even if the papers had been kept for other purposes, to wrap up things, for wads or for cigarette papers, they never could have lasted so long as that. They would have been used up and completely destroyed long before. Why should the prisoners preserve so many old copies? They would have had plenty of later ones. There were no newspapers with a later date. To sum up, the date on these papers, if one only uses a little commonsense, reveals the date of the crime as spring, 1940. Unless . . .

Unless, before the bodies were publicly shown, their pockets were secretly examined and all later issues of papers removed, but even that would not have been enough. It would have been necessary to replace them with old ones. Which means—as the Soviet version tries to impute—that the Germans would have had to get hold of hundreds of copies of Soviet newspapers printed in March and April, 1940, and . . .

I returned to the edge of the pit from which the bodies were still being hauled out.

"You don't seem very well," said the Swedish correspondent.

I shook my head and stood watching. Before me lay the opened pit, and at the bottom of it, layers and layers, packed tightly like sardines in a tin—corpses. Uniforms and overcoats—Polish uniforms—"Sam Browne" belts, buttons, boots, ruffled hair on the skulls, now and then a mouth open in a distorted gasp. The rain had stopped by now, and a pale sun thrust through the branches of the pines. Tit-pi-tit! The little bird raised its voice in joy. The sun shone right into the bottom of the pit, and for a second glinted on a golden tooth which stuck out from an open mouth of one of the corpses. They had forgotten to knock out that one . . . Tit-pi-tit! It was ghastly! Arms and legs entangled, everything pressed down as if by a roller. Row after row, faded and dead, hundreds and hundreds of innocent defenceless soldiers. A *Virtuti Militari* Cross on the breast of a body in the top row, with its head pressed under the boot of a comrade. The next one lay face downwards, still in his cap, which was an exception. All the others in overcoats, their shapes scarcely discernible in that sticky, slimy mass. Mass! A word beloved in the Soviet Union!

"Let's get away from here!" said the Swede, a sympathetic young man, breaking the silence. "You're as pale as death. I can't stand it either."

He took off his spectacles and began to mop the sweat from his face although the air was quite keen.

One moment . . .

The pressed mass of bodies was squeezed together, glued with the cadaverous pulp as if soldered together, causing great difficulty to those workers who had descended to the bottom of the pit to try and wrench the bodies out. They had to wedge each body carefully, and then tear it away from the others in order to drag it out. It's difficult to take one sardine out of a tin without breaking the others . . .

No ! It is absolutely impossible. No human device or technique would enable a search to be made through those pockets, taking out some objects and putting in others, and then to button up the uniforms, and replace and squeeze the bodies again into a mass, layer upon layer ! To guess and to choose where to wrap this or that object in specially prepared newspaper with the required date—or to put it as a wad in the boots ! Or yet to slip into this one's pocket an ounce of Soviet tobacco wrapped up in a sheet of the *Voice of the Union* printed on the 7th of April, 1940 ? It is ridiculous . . . To bury them all again, cover them with the soil (as the Soviet report suggested : see Chapter XVII), dig them up after a month and call in experts to investigate their deaths, to invite and even to strive for a delegation of the International Red Cross to take part in the inquest !

There can be no doubt whatever. They could have been murdered by none but the Bolsheviks.

About 3,300 letters and postcards were found on the bodies. Most of them had been sent from their families in Poland, but a few had been written by the prisoners and never sent. None of these letters, none of these postcards bore a stamp or a date later than April, 1940. This is confirmed by the families who maintain that all correspondence was broken off at this time. Of course, the Russians can state that they refused permis-

sion for further correspondence after this date. But they never claim to have done it, nor is there any reason why they should. Of course they could have done it without any reason. But there is no such excuse for the newspapers, none which could stand the test of simple commonsense.

The work continues . . . the bodies wrenched out of that glued mass are put on stretchers and carried to further rows, whence they are taken in turn for examination. One by one, one by one, day after day, week after week, thousands . . . How many thousands?

\* \* \* \* \*

My second discovery was not really very difficult because the exhumation work was quickly coming to an end at the time of my visit to Katyn.

I must stress here that the Germans, once they had allowed us to come to the graves, gave us absolute freedom of movement, and allowed us to look at anything we wanted or talk to anyone we wished.

A young man with a Red Cross band on his arm, wearing dark spectacles, whom I took to be Dr. Wodzinski's assistant, passed me on his way to one of the graves where he was supervising the workers. I went up to him and touched his shoulder. Everything around us stank—the forest and the trees, the sand and the grass, the shrubs and even living men. The air was saturated with the deadly odour. The man I stopped was also saturated from head to foot, and there was nothing about him to distinguish him from the other men about. The black spectacles even concealed the expression on his face. But I felt an urge towards him.

"Isn't there something wrong about it all?" I asked him.

He drew back his arm and turned abruptly, saying: "What do you mean?"

"Something which is not published in the German Communiqué?"

And in one breath, I revealed to him who I was, where I had come from, and what I had come *for*. The dark spectacles looked me up and down but I could not read the expression behind them.

"You do understand, I came here to know—" I stressed.

"Yes, well—in the first place, the wrong number—"

I removed my handkerchief from my face, and immediately nearly suffocated with that deadly stink. At that time, the figure of ten to thirteen thousand bodies had never been questioned. The Germans held to it obstinately, and stressed it in every official statement.

"You mean—there aren't as many?"

"Of course not!" He shrugged his shoulders. "Altogether we have dug up seven mass graves. Here, as you can see, there are few untouched layers. But we have already reached the bottom. Over there, where the subterranean water has gathered in the small grave where a few greenish corpses float, there might be another fifty. Take it from me—more or less—well, to be quite on the safe side, I should put as the highest possible figure, 4,500. But not a body over that."

"Then why do the Germans maintain their high figure?"

This time it was scarcely a shrug, more like a nervous tic.

"They have choked themselves with their own lie. They can't withdraw their original figure without discrediting all their propaganda. They probably knew the total of missing prisoners, and took for granted that they were all buried here. You ought to know."

I nodded and he continued.

"Well, there you are. Now they are desperately digging the whole hill up, turning it inside out in search for more . . . But all they find are single skeletons in civilian clothes, probably Russians."



"In which case . . . where can the others be?" I asked automatically as if this man in the dark spectacles could know any more than I did. He made an indescribable sound and spread out his arms in a sweeping gesture, over the graves, over the barrack in front of which the workers had lighted a fire to warm themselves. In that gesture, he seemed to embrace the subjects of my own thoughts — the whole of that vast space from the Arctic Ocean to the endless deserts of Asia. An enormous space . . .

Where were the others? To-day we know the Soviet Government seeks to avoid that question at all cost. That is why it clings so desperately to the wrong number given by German propaganda. But in May, 1943, this news was still a revelation.

"Why not ask Professor Buhtz about the number, quite simply and frankly?" he said suddenly. "He seems to be a decent man, and I should be interested myself to know what his answer would be."

Half an hour later, I introduced myself to Professor Buhtz and after having mentioned Dr. Sengalewicz, I asked: "What is your estimate of the total number?"

"Oh, that is a thing we haven't been able to work out yet," he answered honestly, as honestly as a German officer could answer, whose own estimate was in obvious collision with official propaganda.

\* \* \* \* \*

In Katyn, the bonfires around which the workers gathered served a double purpose. They gave warmth and smoke. The latter dispelled, momentarily, the deadly air, as elsewhere it dispels mosquitoes. The eyes of the people standing around were watering. It was there, by the fires, that I saw for the first time the famous Partemon Kisielew who had been the first to show the place of the crime. Other peasants who had also originally given evidence and were employed at the

exhumation works squat around the fires, throwing unfriendly glances at the approaching guests. I can understand them. Over and over again they have to repeat the same gruesome story, through the same interpreter. It is sickening, probably as sickening as having to breathe that stinking air. Is it their fault that they saw it? Of course, they saw it! How the prison coaches drove past, and then drove back again to collect more prisoners. How they turned here and disappeared in the direction of Kosogory (Goat Hills) and how they were loaded up at the goods platform of Gniezdovo station . . . Their faces light up as I turn to them and speak in fluent Russian.

"Who are you? Would you be a Russian?"

"No, I'm a Pole."

"Aaaah . . ."

"Any difference to you?"

They smile. One of them begins to tell the story, all the facts which were more or less known already. A quarrel starts about the number of coaches which ran backwards and forwards between Gniezdovo and Katyn.

"Four!" maintains the story teller.

"Oh, go on with you!" interrupts another who was busy poking at the fire with his stick. "There aren't more than four *czornyje worony* ("black ravens," the usual nickname given in the Soviet Union to the NKVD prison coaches) in the entire Smolensk NKVD. And only three were used here. The fourth one remained in town. They were preceded by a passenger car with the NKVD men and followed by a lorry with the luggage. That's all there was."

"You might have seen three, I saw four!"

"You saw double, being scared of being taken yourself to Kosogory . . ."

The dispute is futile.

"And this place here, in Katyn, is it long since it has been a place of execution?"

"Oooh ! Ho-ho-ho !" they chorus and then fall silent.

"But not always," adds one after a while.

"Well, yes," another picks up, "at times all was quiet over there. Of course the barbed wire remained and a watchman with hounds to guard it. It might happen that a child or a woman would creep under the wire to search for mushrooms. If it were a girl, and young at that, she risked being caught by one of the soldiers, who would raise her skirts and drag her into the bushes . . . He-he-he !" They break into sly and ugly laughter.

One begins to relate a story more to his comrades than to me.

"Aye ! You remember what happened to Marfa from Nove Batioki ? It must have been in August '39 when she ventured to gather some mushrooms. The guard called 'stop !' He knocked her down, tore her skirt and wanted to rape her. Marfa would have shouted but an enormous hound rushed up and stood over them with his tongue hanging, and watched, and watched, and watched . . ."

"And poor Marfa, stiff with fright, couldn't defend herself . . ."

The wind blew the smoke away and brought back the deadly smell. The men spat, each his own way, some into the fire and others to the side of it. Silence fell again.

"Did you hear any shots when they executed them ?" I asked.

"No, no shots." Others confirmed this by nodding.

"Ah, but I did ! I tell you, I heard shots," obstinately maintains old Kisielev. Nobody else had heard, he was the only one.

"How was it that all was kept quiet till now ? Nobody gossiped ?"

"You heard him ? Don't you know that here gossiping is—"

"How should he know?" interrupted Kisielev. "A man from afar? Maybe from abroad, and you jump at him with your 'know'! You see, sir, here in this country it's safer to hold your tongue . . ."

"Yes, I do know. I have also been under the Soviets."

"Well, there you are!" broke in the first one. "He's our man. I mean, he knows well enough. Two words are all he needs to understand."

A Portuguese correspondent has joined us and stands staring at the fire while listening to this alien language.

"What are they talking about?"

The German interpreter has also joined us. I withdraw.

\* \* \* \* \*

Professor Buhtz owns frankly that the circumstances are puzzling. He also had been told that no one had heard the shots except old Kisielev.

"Let me show you the garage." We walk together towards the famous *datcha* (villa), the summer rest-home of the NKVD functionaries. "I have searched that garage in and out," continues the Professor, "for traces of bullets, as I thought that, according to common custom, the Bolsheviks had used it as an execution place. They usually block the entrance with lorries and leave the engines running to deafen any sound. But I can't find any sign of bullets. The victims were apparently shot over the graves. The wood must have silenced the sound. A small calibre was used and it's quite a distance to the nearest cottages. Perhaps there are others who did hear. We haven't questioned everybody in the neighbourhood. Besides, all of them are not still there. Many were enlisted or evacuated."

The *datcha* is a typical Russian villa, very similar to those which had been built before the Revolution, in suburban summer resorts by wealthy business men.

The view spread out before us is gorgeous. For once we can breathe pure air. At our feet, in a deep valley, gleams the river Dniepr, framed by leafless shrubs. There are wooden steps leading right down to the bottom of the valley. It must be lovely in the summer, an excellent place for bathing . . . In summer, when the shrubs bloom, there are sure to be plenty of nightingales, and in autumn when the sorb trees and guelder rose turn red, the wild game will pass overhead in their southward flight to the Black Sea and far beyond—free birds in this imprisoned country, scored across with trenches and shell holes. It must be hard to die, facing that God-given landscape . . . To be shot from this verandah! What mothers could have borne the men who came to rest here—and then went into the woods to perform their hideous task before again returning to rest? I wondered whether the sparrows, busy building their nests under the eaves, could give us any enlightenment. They twitter, but who knows what they are saying? The rest—the trees and shrubs, the lazy river—are silent.

It has started to rain again. Buhtz buttons up his collar and looks bored. It is not the first group he had taken round this place.

"Let's go back," he urges. We return to the wood.

"Excuse me, but could I ask you another question?"

"But of course, I'm here to answer questions."

"Well . . . I would like to know . . . have any cartridge cases been found? Wouldn't it be possible to ascertain what type of ammunition was used?"

The German's face stiffens.

"I cannot tell you anything about it . . . as yet."

But the cartridge case mystery was solved in due time. I was watching the dissection of a body in which the bullet had apparently stuck. Dr. Wodzinski retrieved it with his lancet and I put out my hand to inspect it. The same young man in dark spectacles whispered:

"Oh, they won't let you have that. Nor any cartridge case."

A German major was standing at my side, and I asked his permission to take it. He weighed the flattened piece of lead thoughtfully in the palm of his hand. In the end he handed it over.

"*Ja, ja, das koennen sie behalten*" (You may keep it).

"You were lucky," whispered the man in the dark spectacles.

That evening, I once again bluntly asked Slovincik about the cases. He explained that a certain number had been found but the whole thing was of no importance. "To-day anybody can use any kind of arms . . . cartridge cases are no evidence . . ." He plainly beat about the bush. But it was most striking the way this important question was hushed up by German propaganda, and even more striking that it was not taken up by the Russians. It was noticed by so many of the simplest readers of the German communiqués. How could it possibly have been unobserved by the ever watchful magnifying glasses of Russian propaganda?

But the whole problem was fundamentally quite simple. The ammunition with which the Polish prisoners had been murdered in Katyn was—of German manufacture!

The empty cartridge cases, found in large quantities, were all made by "Gustav Genschow and Co.," a factory in Durlé near Karlsruhe (Baden). They were stamped "Geco 7.65.D." The consequences were disastrous from the point of view of German propaganda. No wonder the German authorities in charge of the exhumation were more than taken aback; they were literally stunned by such a discovery. Probably they were given instructions to hush the truth as discreetly as possible until further light could be thrown on the question. Later on, we learned the sequence of events. The Ministry of Propaganda probably informed the

O.K.H. (*Oberkommando des Heeres*), the Supreme Army Command in its turn sought information from the General Supply Headquarters. Weeks of red-tape correspondence followed because an explanation had to be sought from the "Genschow" works. What was the result?

It appeared that after the Treaty of Rapallo, until about 1929, the "Genschow" works supplied large amounts of ammunition to Soviet Russia, which incidentally, went in transit through Poland. Simultaneously large quantities of the same ammunition and arms were purchased by Poland and the Baltic States. The "Geco" products not only overflowed into the Polish private market, but were in common use in the army. After the Russians had occupied half of Poland, great quantities of that very same ammunition fell into their hands.

The explanation given by the General Supply H.Q. was dated as late as the 31st of May, 1943, which was a few days after my departure from Katyn. Hence it was perfectly logical and easy to understand that, before the 31st of May, the whole thing was kept secret. On the other hand, it would have been rather suspicious if the Germans had had a ready answer prepared beforehand.

The genuine amazement shown by the German authorities has a deep significance . . . If they had committed the crime for propaganda purposes, as the Bolsheviks maintain, they would either have used Russian ammunition, of which they had a plentiful supply after the defeats of the Red Army, or they would have otherwise have prepared an answer to that puzzling question. They would never have allowed themselves to be taken un-awares. It would be silly to suppose that the Nazis could be so naïve as that in questions of criminal efficiency.

Those are the reasons why Russian propaganda found it wiser not to raise the question of the cartridge cases.

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I made one further discovery at Katyn which, though indirectly, throws further light on the identity of the true culprit. It was the scores of Jewish names which appeared in the lists of victims published by the Germans. While I was looking through these lists, I could not resist the temptation of saying to the German officer standing beside me: "H'm . . . Quite a number of Jewish names here?"

"Yes. Quite so . . . Well, what? Is it worth while stressing it?"

Nor did I stress it, I only stated a fact. Whoever is acquainted with that blind, raving anti-Jewish propaganda may well imagine how reluctantly they must have made the concession of publishing scores of Jewish names on the list of the Katyn victims! The same propaganda which so obstinately identified Bolshevism with Jewry.

In German-occupied Poland posters were plastered everywhere announcing the Katyn massacres as a crime committed by "Jewish-bolshevik hangmen." In a popular pamphlet entitled *Mass murder in the Katyn wood* hawked by Nazi propaganda, one could read: "Nobody will be astonished to learn the fact, proved beyond any doubt by evidence of the witnesses, that all the assassins were, without any exception, Jews . . ."

The Germans further stated that the execution had been directed by four members of the NKVD from Minsk, and they named three of the four as having Jewish names, Lew Rybak, Chaim Finberg and Abraham Borissovich. Later on, it was actually confirmed that the executions were really carried out by a specially delegated group from the Minsk NKVD. But the three names quoted were simply taken, quite freely, from the NKVD records which fell into the hands of the Germans after their sudden capture of Minsk. They quoted from them at random.

And at the same time, on the lists of the Katyn vic-



tims published by the Germans, were : Engel Abraham, Godel David, Rosen Samuel, Guttman Izaak, Zusman Ezechiel, Frenkel Izaak, Bernstein Fejwel, Press David, Nirenberg Abraham, Hirshtritt Izrael, etc. etc. . . . And these were supposed to have fallen at the hands of those who were "without exception" Jewish assassins !

The contradiction is too striking and most embarrassing for German propaganda. And yet they publish the lists. This can mean only one thing. If the Germans were, in any way, to falsify the Katyn documents, as the Soviet version implied, they would undoubtedly have started by crossing off the Jewish names. What easier than to hide the documents of Joseph Lewinsohn, of Gluckman, Epstein or Rosenzweig and to label their bodies as "unidentified" ? And yet they did not do it. They could not—because of all the witnesses they themselves had invited.

But it shows what value they attached to a frank and honest investigation of the Katyn murder. They could not risk concealing a long list of documents, which, if it were ever known, would undermine all confidence in the enquiry which had been pursued with the utmost publicity.

They did manage to conceal the identity of the one female body, they succeeded in hushing up the riddle of the cartridge cases for a while, but they could not falsify the identity of scores of bodies dug up in the presence of Polish Red Cross delegates and foreign reporters. They were only too keen for all possible light to be thrown upon the massacre of Katyn Wood because . . . for once, the guilt really was not theirs.

\* \* \* \* \*

After I had returned from Katyn I was often asked to describe my "feelings". Undoubtedly they were feelings of the kind usually described as "blood chilling."

Piles of naked corpses arouse disgust. Piles of clothed corpses arouse awe. Perhaps because the threads of their clothes still bind them to the life of which they had been deprived, the contrast is stronger. The victims unearthed at Katyn were nearly all soldiers, mostly officers. Their uniforms had an eloquence which was tremendous, especially for a Pole. Medals, buttons, belts, Eagle emblems, military crosses. Those were not anonymous bodies, that was not a mass! It was a slaughtered army—one could even say the flower of an army, front-line officers, many of whom had successfully served in no less than three former wars. In any other place, such a gathering of the finest sons of a nation, fallen in battle dress, would be inscribed in the historical annals, perhaps claimed to have been a battle which decided the fate of a continent. Maybe a defeat, but one to be praised and sung by bards, and acknowledged with bowed head by a gallant foe. While here? One very old man reluctantly admitted that he had heard a few shots . . . But what torments the imagination most of all is the individuality of every murder, multiplied to that loathsome mass. It is worse than the extermination of crowds in gas-chambers, or their annihilation by machine-gun fire, where in minutes, or even seconds, hundreds of lives can be destroyed. Here, to the contrary, every single man died slowly, each one waited for his turn to be dragged towards the death-pit, a thousand after a thousand—perhaps in the very eyes of the victim, the bodies of his comrades were arranged in the grave, in rows, tight rows, stamped down by the boots of the oppressors in order to make room for *him* . . . And then he in turn was shot in the back of his head which he was forced to bend. Every body which had been hauled out of the grave before my eyes had had its skull pierced through from occiput to forehead by a bullet fired by an unerring marksman, and each one was an exhibit of martyrdom—the fright and

despair joined to all those last thoughts, of which we, the living, can know nothing at all.

I once talked with a man who had been shot through the skull with a pistol of very small calibre, and who survived for a couple of days with the bullet stuck somewhere in his head. "I felt," he whispered, "as if a glass cracked, it just clicked and that was all . . . " Maybe . . .

One after one, the bodies are carried, this time in reversed order, from top to bottom of the grave, while on that other occasion they had fallen in, to fill it from bottom to top. One feels a nervous fascination, a cruel curiosity which for nights will drive sleep from one's eyes, and returns with every corpse carried past—to know exactly how it happened.

Probably there were three assassins. Two of them held the victim by the arms, while the third fired the shot. It had to be a thorough job. The individual reactions and sufferings can sometimes be guessed from certain details:—teeth knocked out by the butt-end of a rifle, or stabs from a four-sided Russian bayonet. Many had their hands tied with string, always with the same masterly knot. Some had their coats thrown over their heads and tied round the neck to form a bag which was filled with sawdust to silence the cries . . . Open mouths filled with sand . . . empty eye sockets which express no more but death.

But the individuality of each corpse was not alone expressed by uniform, by the badges which revealed its rank, by a cross on the breast or in a pocket. Even more convincingly, it cried from the various little objects which were kept until the last moment, and letters, which have remained alive—alive with every single word still legible. Names after names—thousands!

"Do you wish to have a look at the list?" The German turns towards me. He has an indifferent, a bored expression as he thrusts the list under my nose.

Of course I want to see it ! A burning curiosity fills me to seek for the names which I remember—for people that I know . . .

\* \* \* \* \*

Yes ! Ciszewski Tadeusz. No. 1690. I knew him. Met him in the county of Braclaw.

Anton Konstanty, Capt. We sat on the same bench at school.

Wierszylo Tadeusz, Lieut. No. 233. Teddy . . . Funny that when I think of him, it is rather of his vices than his virtues. Who would not remember Teddy ? A solicitor, rather touchy on the subject of his growing belly, a heavy drinker and a greedy eater. "Ho-ho !" he used to say, "Ho-ho !" and raise his eyebrows. "Good stroke that ! Where did you learn billiards ?" And in July, 1939, he shook his head. "I bought a pair of jack-boots," he puffed out his lips, "what with the war coming and I—an officer in the Armoured Corps—I advise you to do the same and prepare yourself. Of course it's none of my business. Hey ! Waiter ! What about another bottle, and bring me some more butter . . ." After his name, a note : "Two postcards, two letters. One dated the 8th of September 1939, eight pages long."

"Eight pages ?"

"You said something ?"

"Oh, nothing. Just a letter eight pages long."

"Was he a friend or a relation ? Which number ? Two three three. If you wish you may have the letter to read or repeat to his family."

"No, no, I don't want to read it . . ."

Names . . . Names . . . Names . . .

And here is . . . Peter . . . my brother-in-law. "Don't be a pig," he used to say, pushing the dish towards you, "eat as much as you like!" That was one of his favourite little jokes. Always, always, gay and smiling. My memories are bathed in that smile of his—as those dripping pine trees are bathed in rising mist, as seen through the closed window of this stuffy little hut.

No. 1078. Krahelski Piotr. His uniform was without badges. Letters, postcards, and a certificate of inoculation No. 318. That is all . . .

The next one, No. 1079. Kodymowski Stanislaw Marjan, Lieut. A letter written to his wife and never posted. His paybook. A civil servant's identity card. Certificate of inoculation No. 1260. I never knew him.

The next . . .

Even this list, lying in a provisionally constructed barracks, seems saturated with the deadly stink. It is suffocating.

"Couldn't we open the window?"

"No," forbids the German officer. "It will only stink more from the wood."

\* \* \* \* \*

Letters, letters, letters . . .

Letters from their families, most of them still legible. Many written by the prisoners themselves while still in Kozielsk and never posted. About 1650 letters, 1640 postcards and some eighty telegrams were found on the bodies. Not one letter, not a single postcard or telegram bore a date later than April, 1940.

Who has not held these letters in his hand—these human thoughts retrieved from a mass of rotting corpses—can perhaps treat the Katyn case as a platform for political bargaining, and form his judgment accordingly. Anyone who has read them, a handkerchief to his nose and mouth because of the ghastly smell—while standing

over the body of the "dearest" to whom they are addressed—can have no hesitation whatsoever as to his duty. "To thrust the truth down the throats of the entire world. To shout it aloud!"

The letters were kept by the prisoners, sometimes in their breast or side pockets, sometimes in their back trouser pocket or in their jackboots, according to the will of the owner. They were concealed and held as holy relics. To-day they are shown publicly as exhibits, as a profane implement of enemy propaganda.

About two miles from Kosogory in a village called Gruszczénka, on the verandah of one of the houses, the Germans had arranged a display of the Katyn exhibits. They were displayed like objects in a museum in glass show cases. Anyone could come and inspect them and see the characteristic things found on the murdered victims, and see the state of preservation. One could see identity cards alongside shoulder badges, banknotes and bills, medals and crosses, and a score of other little things besides the letters. German propaganda knew how to excite curiosity in order to infiltrate its political ideas.

But I must admit that it was there that my eyes were blurred with tears, caused neither by the stench nor the protective smoke of bonfires.

It was on the third day of our stay in Katyn. We had returned from the graves, full of the hideous sight of piles of rotting bodies—a sight to which we were already becoming accustomed. Here everything was clean, and through the shining glass we stared at the faded postcards. They were written in large calligraphic writing. Children's letters to their fathers.

8th January, 1940. Dear Daddy! Dearest!  
Why don't you come back? Mummy told me that with the coloured chalks I received from you for my birthday . . . I don't go to school now because of

the cold. When you return you will be glad to discover that we have a little dog now. Mummy has named it . . . Filus . . .

. . . Czes.

12th February, 1940. Dear Papa, the war will surely end soon now. We long for you so much and we all kiss you and hug you with all our might. Irene has cut her hair short and Mummy was very angry. Do you live in a warm house, because we are short of fuel? Mummy wanted to send you warm woollen gloves but . . . In April, we shall go to Uncle Adam's, and I will write to you from there to tell you how it is . . .

In April . . . In April, 1940, the dearest Daddy of Czes and Irene's Papa were shot through the back of the head.

## XIV

### A NEW CRIME ?

I LEFT Katyn during the last days of May, 1943, after spending four days there. When my reports reached the Underground Authorities of Wilno and Warsaw, they were already vaguely aware from earlier information that the figures of ten to twelve thousand dead, proclaimed by the Germans, was incorrect, and what had been discovered was only the bodies of officers previously interned in Kozielsk camp. But no one had detailed figures then because the work of exhumation was still proceeding. My figures were the most recent, but they were not final.

A few days later, on the 6th of June, 1943, the Germans closed their investigations in Katyn. In their official communiqués, published after a short delay, they gave the full text of reports prepared by the Polish authorities and by Dr. Buhtz. Both these reports stated that in the seven mass graves 4,143 bodies were found.

This figure is not only in marked contrast to the number hitherto maintained, being scarcely a third of the total of missing Polish officers, but is even smaller than the number of prisoners missing from Kozielsk camp. What happened to the rest of them ?

Shortly afterwards, the riddle was solved, at any rate as to the remainder of those from Kozielsk. A few days before the closing of the exhumation works, apparently the diggers had discovered a new grave, the eighth to be found. It was small, and according to the estimate of the Polish Red Cross delegation, could not



have contained more than about a hundred bodies. The first bodies taken from this grave had neither warm underwear nor winter coats on them. Newspapers found on them, such as the *Roboty i Put* were dated from the 1st to the 6th of May, which would also point to their being murdered in May, 1940, when the weather had become warm. It fitted in very well with the story of the evacuation from Kozielsk, according to which a hundred prisoners were sent away on the 10th and 11th of May, and had disappeared ever since. If we add a hundred to the 4,143 taken from the seven former graves, we get a figure which is nearly the exact figure of the officers missing from Kozielsk camp.

This, only a hypothetical supposition at first, was later to be fully confirmed. Firstly, if we compare the list of those identified by the Germans and published in their reports with the provisional list of missing Poles handed by General Sikorski to Stalin, which comprised 3,845 names, we shall discover that the latter list included 80% of the names identified in Katyn two years later, and that each one of those names had had the annotation "Kozielsk" added to it. The two lists match as well as the number of those exhumed at Katyn matches with the number of those missing from Kozielsk.

Further to that, it had been discovered that on the bodies in Katyn a great many small objects were found, such as crude wooden cigarette cases, boxes, etc., all of which had the name "Kozielsk" carved on them. What is even more important, all the diaries and notebooks were dated from Kozielsk. It is obvious that the prisoners from Starobielsk and Ostashkov were just as likely to carve objects in wood and keep diaries. It is scarcely conceivable, if they also were buried in Katyn, that amongst the thousands of bodies exhumed not a single one had some notebook or other object bearing the name of Starobielsk or Ostashkov.

And lastly, it is noteworthy that in the Ostashkov

camp there was a large group of prisoners from the Polish State Police Force. As is known, the Polish Police wore dark navy blue uniforms, at the first glance very different in both colour and cut from the military uniform. It can be asserted that out of that great group of police officers and other ranks who had disappeared from Ostashkov, not a single one was identified among the Katyn victims. Neither police uniforms nor police documents were found there.

The truth is that neither the prisoners from Ostashkov nor those from Starobielsk were murdered at Katyn, therefore the total number discovered there, which corresponded so closely to the number of prisoners from Kozielsk, cannot exceed the figure of 4,143 established for the first seven graves, plus the 100 estimated for the eighth grave—in all 4,243, or approximately 4,250.

But what did the Germans do next? Strangled by the lie of their own propaganda, which for over six weeks had been shouting to the whole world that there were ten to twelve thousand bodies, they were afraid to undermine confidence in their version, and therefore did not want to give less than their exaggerated figure. That was why, after having dug up the eighth grave, which was only 5 metres long and 2 metres wide, they examined thirteen bodies and then covered them all up again, giving the excuse that the "heat and plague of flies" had made further investigation impossible. This allowed them to leave the total figure open, and maintain that there were ten to twelve thousand bodies buried in Katyn.

The absurdity of this thesis is obvious. It would seem by it that the little eighth grave (in spite of six weeks' thorough search no other graves were ever found) contained something between six and eight thousand bodies, and if we take the total figure of missing prisoners, even about ten thousand . . . !

How far the German figure of ten to twelve thousand

bodies was built upon fantastic and utterly improbable grounds is proved, amongst other things, by the striking contradiction between their official documents and the reports prepared by those Germans who supervised the exhumation works. Let me remind you that Ludwig Voss, secretary of the German Field Police, in his early report on the 26th of April, 1943, did not mention ten or twelve thousand, but only eight to nine thousand bodies. In his final report, which closed the inquest, he stated that 4,143 bodies were exhumed, to which he added : " In the last days, at a little distance from the others, an eighth grave was discovered, whose capacity is unknown as yet." Not only was there no mention of " from ten to twelve thousand " but there was no mention of " from eight to nine thousand." There were only 4,143 bodies plus those in the eighth grave, which is strictly in accordance with the truth.

But the most competent witness was Dr. Buhtz. In his report he finally stated : " All the bodies dug up from the seven graves were decently buried in newly prepared graves situated North-West of the original graves. Thirteen bodies of Poles, clad in uniform, unearched from the eighth grave, have been reburied in it, after undergoing a post-mortem and after their documents had been examined and safeguarded." (*Collection of German Documents*, p. 42).

Further on, p. 47, we read : " 4,143 bodies have been exhumed."

A confirmation of this figure is to be found in the summary to which only the following is added : " A further large number of victims awaits exhumation, identification and examination."

In the entire statement, which occupied 56 pages and was printed in book form, Dr. Buhtz not only omitted any mention of the " ten to twelve thousand " but with obvious embarrassment avoided this detail of German propaganda. Everything beyond the given number

4,143 was modestly called "a further large number of victims still awaiting exhumation."

On one side this showed reluctance to support the figure given by Nazi propaganda, and on the other, the impossibility of bluntly contradicting it by a German Medical Officer. The expression "a large number of victims" used by the head of the investigation is very much out of proportion if it was supposed to describe a figure two or three times as large as the number already exhumed.

Once again, all that confirms the impression that the "heat and flies" were not the cause but only an excuse to stop further investigation to avoid compromising German propaganda.

Viewed from this angle, the whole case appears in a different light. The initial question—"how many?"—about which neither side had seemed to trouble very much is now brought into the limelight, concentrated until now on the most essential question—"who had committed the murder?"

Once we can establish as certain that there were no more than 4,250 bodies and all of them were of the inmates of Kozielsk, and then consider the similarity of the fate and time of disbandment of all three camps, there remains no doubt that the others must have been murdered and without doubt by the same criminal who committed the Katyn crime.

Even if in spite of all the other proofs and evidence we do suppose for a moment that the Katyn crime was committed by the Germans, as the Bolsheviks wish to persuade us, such an assumption will not answer the question, who murdered the remaining ten thousand? What did the Soviet Government do about it?

We now come to the most paradoxical part of the whole tragedy: the Soviet Government supports the German version only in the one item which is false! All other revelations made by the Germans it brushes

away, and retains the lie about the number of murdered men. After the figure of "ten to twelve thousand" had been established by German propaganda, the Soviet Commission (which after the withdrawal of the Germans from Smolensk arrived at Katyn at the beginning of 1944) seized the opportunity of this lie being well known, and proclaimed that there were some eleven thousand bodies. While accusing the Nazis of committing the crime the Commission also :

1. Immediately named the approximate total of missing prisoners.

2. Skilfully countered a very awkward question which might suddenly be put to them : Where are the others ?

It must also be mentioned here that the Soviet Commission (see Chapter XVII) passed over this problem without any respect for possible criticism, in two laconic sentences which give no proofs.

"A large number of bodies clad in Polish military uniform were found in the graves. The total number of bodies, as calculated by the medico-legal experts, is 1,000."

Not a word about how and when this calculation had been made. Because no such calculation ever *was* made, which can be proved by the report itself as it states that the Commission had only exhumed and examined 952 bodies.

This striking disregard with which the Bolsheviks dispose of a most awkward question cannot satisfy anyone who sincerely seeks the truth. But need this truth be sought for any longer ? The truth is . . . known.

What in May and June, 1943, was only known to a few initiated persons, six months later had been established as a certainty of which the Polish Government in London had ample proof and documents. These facts were passed on to other Allies, so that from 1944 onwards all those who directed world events, on the

strength of all this evidence, were not only aware that the Katyn crime had been committed by the Bolsheviks, but they also knew that the Bolsheviks had committed a further and greater crime of murdering in a place unknown twice the number of equally defenceless prisoners.

But unfortunately it was very awkward for those in the Allied camp to unveil the naked truth. They were still anxious to collaborate with the Soviet Union and they took great pains to convince Western public opinion, to make it digest the rather unsavoury pill of alliance between the Democratic powers and the Bolshevik Totalitarian State. They were still anxious to show the Soviet Ally in the best possible light and did not wish to drag out its criminal deeds. That was why the Katyn case, although no longer a mystery, since the amount of murdered prisoners was known, was never placed before the forum of public opinion in its true version.

Faced by the possibility of a new atrocity, of which the Soviet Union was undoubtedly guilty, every effort was pursued in Allied circles to hush the whole case, and even to give a silent approval of the version published by the Soviet Commission. A year later, when the case was included in the indictment laid before the Allied Tribunal at Nuremberg, the other Allies put their signature beside that of General Rudenko, the Soviet representative, who in the particular case represented none other than the culprit who committed the crime which was to be tried by the Tribunal of International Justice. . .

This alone, notwithstanding the atrocity of the Katyn murder makes it a deed for which it is difficult to find a parallel in the history of human relationships, as well as in the history of legal practice. Where else do we find a case in which the culprit occupied the bench instead of being put into the dock?

## XV

### THE STORY THE COURT DID NOT HEAR

WHILE the trial of major War criminals was beginning in the bomb-shattered city of Nuremberg, a man was wandering aimlessly through the other bomb-shattered cities of central and northern Germany. He was a short, young man and from his worn-out clothing and general weariness was easily recognizable as one of the millions of foreign workers sent to slave labour in the Reich. From his habit of spitting, blowing his nose with his fingers and wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, it could be guessed that he came from the eastern part of Europe. From his pronunciation, there could be no doubt that he was a Russian.

After the Allied victory, a Russian heading in the opposite direction from his homeland was quite a common sight in Germany. There was nothing sensational about it. Tens, hundreds, even thousands of other Russians were trying to escape from returning to the "paradise of the working masses."

This Russian was a deported worker, issued with an *Arbeitskarte*, who had stayed in Dreilinden near Berlin since the middle of 1944. From thence he travelled to the workshops of Grunewald. His life was the same as that of all other slave workers; hard labour, scarcely any pay, rationed food, billets in barracks—and in the final stages of the war, day and night, night and day—bombs, bombs, bombs! The never-ceasing air raids became intolerable. Life was practically lived

in the confinement of stuffy unbearable shelters. The lack of sleep inflamed his eyes which had been weak since childhood.

When the Red Army came closer and closer to Berlin, this Russian thought it better to start off, through piles of rubble, under the perpetual drone of Allied planes, hiding in the bottom of ditches for battles to shift elsewhere, eating less and sleeping no more—all that in preference to the liberation brought by the Bolsheviks. He drifted on to Hamburg and then on towards Bremen. On the way, he picked up a companion, a fellow-countryman and ex-prisoner of war, who was also not anxious to return to his homeland. While he wandered now, homeless but happy, happy because of suddenly feeling genuinely free for the first time in his life, the news reached him 'that in a town hitherto unknown to him, Nuremberg, a great trial was being prepared, the trial by Humanity's Justice of the atrocities committed in this awful war.

And he was a man who knew about one such atrocity. He knew more about it than any of those who sat on the Nuremberg Tribunal. Because this Russian was none other than Ivan Krivozhertzov, an inhabitant of Nove Batioki, house No. 119, not far from Smolensk, and quite close to the little station of Gniezdovo in the vicinity of the Kosogory wood.

Krivozhertzov, made dizzy with the slogans of freedom and democracy heard at every step amongst the ruins of Hitlerite Germany, believed that the reign of justice and truth had come at last. And he also felt that it was his duty to take his share in the administration of justice, after the experience of his short but hard life. Which shows, that in spite of all he had seen, he was essentially very naïve. And his accidental companion whom he called Mishka, a Russian prisoner of war, also proved to be inexperienced in politics. What is even more astonishing is that they found a third enthusiast, also a



Russian but an educated man, an engineer who spoke many languages and agreed to be their interpreter.

And so this man and Krivozhertzov went to an American H.Q. in Bremen. They were received by an American soldier who sat in a rather queer position with his legs on the desk, chewing something, and his arms folded across his chest. He asked them why they came.

"I have something important to report," answered Krivozhertzov through his interpreter.

The soldier spat out his chewing gum, lighted a cigarette instead, and took his legs off the desk, not without discomfort because they had grown stiff, and then disappeared in search of an officer.

When Krivozhertzov started to talk, the engineer translated and the Americans listened. At first they grinned ironically. When they broke into laughter, Krivozhertzov became perplexed. But then, all of a sudden, one of them became serious and said: "I think we ought to send him back to the Russian lines. They will surely know what to do about it all, and how to make best use of his evidence . . ."

Krivozhertzov grew pale. To-day, he cannot tell what frightened him more; the serious tone in which the words were spoken or their meaning . . . He ran away. Finding his friend, Mishka, he only hissed out: "Beat it!"

They set out from Bremen on foot. Somewhere they boarded a crawling train, and it carried them through shattered Germany, all the way to . . .

I do not think it essential to reveal where and how I came across Ivan Krivozhertzov who, at about the very time in which the Katyn case was brought before the Nuremberg Tribunal by the Russian Prosecutor, related to me his story in detail—a story which he never had the chance to tell to the Nuremberg Judges.

"Am I to start from the beginning?"

"From the very beginning."

"All right. Before I come to the case itself, let me tell you something about myself. There was a time when we owned about 24 acres in the village of Nove Batioki. We lived about seven miles to the west of Smolensk in the direction of Vitebsk. It wasn't too much land but enough to feed us all and life wasn't so bad before the revolution. My father was a determined worker. My mother, whose maiden name was Zacharov, came from the neighbourhood. Our family—there were two sisters besides me—was liked and esteemed. I often had proof of this when, before falling asleep on top of the big stove, I saw my father, as if through a mist, sitting at the table surrounded by friendly neighbours, my mother smiling . . . yes, life was good then. And our life was so far away from all the great happenings in the world. The traffic on the highway to Vitebsk was scarce. Along one side of the road stood a row of thatched cottages very like any other village in that part of the world. On the other side of the road stretched—the forest. I grew up watching that forest. At that time it belonged to a Pole, a certain Mr. Kozlicki. They called it Katyn wood. A part of it, nearer to Smolensk, was called Kosogory, and further still "the Robbers' Well" and the "Black Marsh." In childhood, these names made us shudder. But we did wander in the forest in search of dry wood, bilberries and mushrooms, as did everybody else.

"I don't remember much more of the time before the revolution and what I do recollect is like a dream. I was born in 1915. But I remember people saying that when the revolution came, at first things did not change much for the worse. We were so far away. Mr. Kozlicki was deprived of his forest which was nationalized. But we still used to go to it to gather branches and berries and mushrooms.

"In 1926 when I was eleven came the first change which I can remember. Part of our land was taken from us and my father was left with about 15 acres. But he continued to work in the same way as did his father and his grandfather and all those whom we knew around us. And then suddenly, in 1929, disaster came! Collectivization . . .

"One day father came home—I remember it very well—he flung his cap on to the floor and sat down heavily on the bench by the table. He bent his head wearily and leant it on his veined hands, the strong hands of a labourer, and he sat there and brooded . . . He had just learned that from a certain day he could be classed among the 'Kulaks.' It was a name given to rich peasants, who, sooner or later, were usually deported somewhere to the north for compulsory labour in concentration camps. They weren't called that at the time because nobody had ever heard about Hitler yet, but that's what they were. People knew well enough what to expect from them. And so father ran away, together with my mother and my younger sister. They escaped to the Urals.

"I remained with my elder sister. She was sixteen, I was fourteen. We went to work in a Kolkhoz. Two years later father returned from the Urals. Homesickness had driven him back, and shortly afterwards he was arrested and sent to prison."

"What for?"

"For contravention of article 58, clause 10. In Russia, one usually knows the number of the paragraph but not its content.

"To our astonishment he returned after nine months. Hardly himself, mind you, a physical ruin incapable of work. He returned apathetic to his own village, once a free farmer on his own land, now a slave labourer on a Kolkhoz. He couldn't bear it long. A political suspect, he was soon got rid of by the kolkhoz manage-

ment. Somewhere in his wanderings in the Urals, he had learned the glazier's craft, so now he tried to make a living by it. But who would care to replace window panes in a country rotten with misery, deprived of a morrow and a hope . . . A broken pane used to be patched with an old Soviet newspaper. It was cheaper and you could boast of spreading official propaganda among your neighbours . . . he-he . . .

"For a year or two, my father still hung about the neighbourhood, till in 1933, he was arrested once more. This time we didn't even know the number of the paragraph, and anyhow who would bother to inform us? I somehow managed to get along amongst those shattered pieces of life which were left to us. I persevered and finished school and learned turnery. One day in 1937, they called me from the workshop. 'There's a letter for you,' they told me, 'an official letter.' I read it. It was an answer to our enquiries: 'the whereabouts of your father are unknown.' That was the usual form they used when someone was shot without trial.

"I made the sign of the Cross in the direction of the Kosogory forest and returned to work."

"Why in the direction of Kosogory?"

"Because I thought that maybe it was there . . . You see, that wood, ever since the early days of the revolution, had been chosen for an execution place. Now and then, they used to bring some wretched men there. Nobody looked at them and nobody wanted to see them. They were shot as they stood and buried where they fell, the soil was smoothed over them and then people would wander again, over their graves, in search of mushrooms or wood. It wasn't often that these executions happened, until in 1929 a GPU Commission arrived, searched the neighbourhood and requisitioned the wood. Wire was set round it, and on the roadside a fence was put up with a gate. Over this gate, a notice read: "Prohibited zone of GPU.

Entrance forbidden to strangers.'

"From now on, shots were heard more often in the wood, but not all the time. Sometimes the wood was silent for weeks. People became accustomed to this strange place, and used to squeeze under the wire and walk about as before. Sometimes one would be caught by the guards. He usually managed to get away with the blow of a rifle butt or a sore jaw at the most. That's how we came to know that in the middle of the wood they had built a house, a *datcha*. It stood right on the bank of the Dniepr, and was permanently occupied by GPU functionaries. People already knew the watchmen, the cook, the maidservant and the driver who used to travel backwards and forwards from there to Smolensk. In summer, GPU officers would come there to spend their holidays. And that was where the convoys of convicts were brought. The executioners also lived there. In time, everyone in the neighbourhood knew these details, but as was customary, nobody mentioned them aloud.

"Life dragged on. I still worked in the village, at times as blacksmith, then as a locksmith, and when no technical labour was needed, simply as a farm hand. I wasn't called up for military service because of my weak eyes. That's why I never took part in the Finnish campaign. In the winter of 1940 I joined the *Krasnaya Zoria* ("Red Dawn") Kolkhoz which embraced the following villages of the Katyn Rural Soviet: Nove Batioki, Gniezdovo, Grushchenka and Zylki. I was billeted in Grushchenka. I increased the circle of my friends and made many acquaintances . . . One got to know people in the same way as one knows the neighbouring fields and woods.

"The spring of 1940 was coming. I was sent to work on the hot-beds close to Gniezdovo railway station. When I raised my head from my work with the manure, I could watch the railway track which ran from Smolensk to Vitebsk. Now, I walked along the main road

on my way to work. That was why it was impossible for me not to notice that from a time early in March, prisoners from Smolensk were driven daily in open lorries towards the Kosogory forest. They had spades and picks with them as if they were being taken there to work. On the third day I learned that some of the inhabitants of our kolkhoz had spoken to the prisoners.

"What are they supposed to do there?" I asked.

"They are digging pits."

"By then, the GPU had changed its name to the NKVD which didn't mean that it had changed its methods. So nobody asked the purpose of the pits. Everybody guessed. But to have to employ so many prisoners! People shook their heads.

"I remember the morning of the 14th of March. I was working closer to the main road that day and I distinctly saw the convoy of vehicles which moved along it. Preceded by a passenger car came the *czornyj woron* (black raven) and yet another car. They headed for Kosogory. That was all I saw, but my sister was working at that time with the 'gardeners' brigade' which was used for transporting manure to the hot-beds and she had to pass the station on her way. We met at meal time, and I told her that I had seen a convoy of prison cars. She answered: 'I know. I saw more than you did. They brought prisoners to the station. I think they must be Finns. They loaded them into the "ravens."' Chrustalev also saw it."

"Roman Chrustalev was also employed in carting manure and had to pass the station as well. That evening I asked him: 'How is it, Chrustalev? I hear they have brought some Finns to be shot?'"

"Those aren't Finns. They're Poles. I know their uniforms.' Chrustalev had taken part in the Polish war in 1920. I had never seen any Poles and had never had anything to do with them. Unless, yes, I remembered that people spoke about them when talking of olden

times. That reminded me of my father and then I thought of all we had had to suffer. Somehow I felt a pang in my heart."

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I interrupted Krivozhertzov to search among my notes. Yes, the story confirmed the statement of a Polish officer who spoke of a transport which left Kozielsk camp on the 8th of March, 1940, and had disappeared behind the walls of Smolensk prison on the 13th of March.

"Good. What happened next?" I asked.

"Next?" He brooded for a while. "Next came further transports and it went on like that all through the month of April. Everybody around knew of it. Somehow, although people were not talkative, we soon learned that these transports came from Kozielsk through Smolensk.

"On one occasion when there was plenty to drink, we learned a lot from a certain Siemion Andreyev, a locksmith from the Krasnyj Bor station who had many friends among the railway workers. He told us that in Smolensk the transports were broken up into smaller groups of two to three railway trucks at a time. They were next sent along two different tracks, of which one, the so-called Alexandrovskaya line, runs directly through Gniezdovo, while the other one, the Licharlovskaya line, passes nearby. But they were joined by a side-track which led to Gniezdovo from the latter one. The whole operation was arranged that way in order to bring the wagons to the blank track which was too short to hold more carriages at a time, but as it was a little to the north of the station, rather aside and not so much in view, it was more suitable for the purpose. It was difficult to see from the station what was happening on this blank track. Prison cars immediately drove up to the railway trucks and the prisoners were hastily loaded

into them. The whole was surrounded by a strong cordon of NKVD men ready to fire.

"In April the transports arrived daily. They were sent from Gniezdovo to the Kosogory forest at various hours of the day, but nobody heard of any being sent at night. A relation of mine, Anani Andreyev, one day questioned an NKVD functionary with whom he was acquainted, and who was in charge of the guards watching the transports which arrived at Gniezdovo. I don't remember his name although he came from the Katyn district and, I believe, for some time in 1928, had presided over the Sielsoviet (rural council) in Syrli-pieckovo. Later on he had trained for the GPU. His was an easy life.

" 'What's the meaning of all these Poles being brought here?' Anani asked him casually. 'Are you sending them to a camp or what?'

" 'Caaaaaamp?' drawled the NKVD man. 'Where did you see any camp round here? Eh?'

" 'True enough, there don't seem to be any camps around . . . '

" 'Well, then! Why do you ask silly questions?' and he slashed his jackboot with a twig as he turned away. Anani thought it better not to ask any more questions.

"I also knew someone who had been permanently engaged since 1937 as a driver of one of the 'black ravens' belonging to the Smolensk NKVD. His name was Jakim Rozuvayev and his nickname was Kim. From him I learned that the Smolensk NKVD was only in charge of the prisoners during their transport by rail from Smolensk to Gniezdovo, and of the convoys which took them to Kosogory. There they were taken over and executed by functionaries of the NKVD from Minsk, specially brought over for the purpose. Such an arrangement was probably meant to hinder spreading the details among the local population, the Minsk



functionaries being unknown in the neighbourhood.

"I talked more than once with Kim later on. When the executions ended he received high remuneration, which enabled him to buy a motor-cycle. He and a friend of his, a foreman of the NKVD garage, used to drive about on that motor-bike, drinking themselves to death. While spending their time in such a merry-go-round, they dropped many a hint and disclosed plenty of details, but it was obvious that the whole operation of murdering the Polish prisoners was skilfully organized on a system which divided the different functions so that nobody could know everything from beginning to end. There were only hints, a few details and scraps of information whispered about. For example, it somehow became known that there were not more than fifty executioners, apparently volunteers from the staff of the NKVD in Minsk. Who decided their number, I cannot tell.

"During all that time, Kosogory forest was heavily guarded, not as before when only an occasional watchman strolled about with a dog. It was quite impossible to get in or out of the wood now, but to tell the truth nobody ever thought of doing it, during that gruesome April. People used to avoid the place. And all the time, day after day, those transports were coming in . . .

"Once at dusk, which I remember very well as it was such a chilly evening, perhaps the 23rd or 24th of April, I was walking along the main road to the station. Some cars coming up behind me had just switched on their headlamps. They passed me, all lorries, some of which were open and some with hoods. I watched from the ditch in which I had taken refuge. They were loaded with suitcases, coats, leather jackets and sheepskin coats, all sorts of knapsacks and other bags. On each of the lorries sat two NKVD guards. The caravan passed me, and for a long while I could see the patches of light jerkily reflected on the clumps of trees and bushes

along the roadside. It was getting late and I hurried home.

"People around became even more silent and a gloomy shadow seemed to hang over our thoughts. As I have already said, it was no novelty to have convicts executed in Kosogory forest, but no one had ever heard of such mass executions done in such haste as during that fateful April of 1940. Fear crept into your bones — as people say."

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Krivozhertzov took a deep gulp from a bottle, and leaned back in his seat. He remained silent for a while.

"Didn't you hear any shots?" I asked in the end.

"No. Neither did anyone else I knew. Perhaps someone passing by closer had heard, or perhaps they used to leave the engines of their lorries running, a well-known device of the NKVD. Anyone passing along the road would only hear the drone of the motors and wasn't likely to notice anything else."

"Yes, that's more or less what all the others said in Katyn. But why did old Kisielev obstinately maintain that he did hear the shots?"

Krivozhertzov scratched his mop of hair.

"Oh, him? I reckon that once he started his tale, the old man just went on and maybe exaggerated a bit. Although he did live closer than anyone else. Yes . . . Maybe Kisielev did know more than the others did, and who knows whether he told even everything he knew at the German enquiry?"

"But the Soviet communiqué maintains that the Germans had beaten him during the enquiry. As a matter of fact they claim that all the witnesses were tortured by the Germans. Old Kisielev was even supposed to have gone deaf and had his arm broken as a result of such treatment."

Krivozhertzov laughed.

"I daresay I know who was the one to give him such treatment ! But I'll come to that later on. Let me tell you what happened when the Germans came . . .

"The German Army was approaching us from the south, advancing along the river Dniepr. That was immediately after they had forced the 'Stalin Line.' They passed in our neighbourhood. Smolensk was attacked on the 16th of July and they captured it on the 19th. The first patrols to reach our village came only about ten days later.

"At the beginning, great hopes were attached to the coming of the Germans. Older people especially were looking forward to the end of Bolshevism. 'The Germans will soon go back to where they came from and then the good old days will return,' that's what they all said.

"Not later than August of the same year, people began once more to wander peacefully about the Katyn forest in search of mushrooms and fuel. I myself spent a lot of time there, cutting wood for the Germans. But things happening all around were so tremendously important, one event followed so swiftly on top of the other, that nobody had time to bother about the awful massacre of the Polish prisoners. Besides, of what interest would it be to the Germans ? We never gave it a thought, and never wondered whether they knew about it or not.

"In the *datcha* of Kosogory wood, a high-ranking German officer lived. I didn't know his actual rank but people used to say that he was a General. God knows if he really was one. But he didn't stop us from walking about the forest and anyone was free to do as he liked."

"One moment," I interrupted, "wasn't there a German unit quartered in the *datcha* ? It was called 'Staff Headquarters of the 537 labour battalion.' Anyhow, that's what the Soviet communiqué maintains."

"No, there did actually exist such a staff unit, but not of a 'labour battalion' but of the German Pioneer Corps. And they had their Headquarters, not in Katyn, but at Gniezdovo. Anyone in the neighbourhood could point them out to you. They were stationed in the 'B.W.C. building' which stood for 'Bielorussian Military District' and was a stone's throw from the railway station."

"While we speak of the Russian communiqué, I would like to ask another question. Weren't there any camps for Polish prisoners of war in the neighbourhood? Perhaps a little earlier or maybe later on?"

"There weren't any then or at any other time. Except for those prisoners who were unloaded at Gniezdovo in 1940, nobody ever saw any, or even heard of any from other people."

"Can there be any grounds for the statement included in the Soviet communiqué, that in Autumn, 1941, the Germans organized mass round-ups of Polish prisoners who were supposed to have escaped from camps alleged to be in the neighbourhood?"

"It's a direct lie," cut in Krivozhertzov. "On the contrary, it happens that there were no round-ups organized in our neighbourhood by the Germans, although it was known that elsewhere an awful terror raged. Only one such case happened in our neighbourhood, but that was not in the autumn of 1941 but in the summer of 1942. By that time, in regions further from the main routes and deep behind the front, underground activities began to spring up. One day a former student of the Smolensk Medical Institute arrived at Gniezdovo from Smolensk. I forget his name but he was known to local people, as he had been born in the district. What nobody knew was that he was now in the service of the S.D. (*Sicherheitsdienst*), the German Security Force. He established contact with his former acquaintances whom he knew were communist sympathizers. In particular,

he concentrated his attention on a girl called Czuchrin and nicknamed 'Ninka' who was also a former student. In her presence, he mocked at the local communists for being cowardly and inactive. Of course it was a provocation. 'Plenty of students seem to loiter about here,' he sneered, 'but it doesn't look as if they had any guts or sense in them.'

"Ninka flared up at this challenge and gave away the secret by telling him that they were just in the very act of organizing a resistance movement under the leadership of a former communist party man whose nickname was Colonel Sasha. She told him other details as well. The instigator returned to Smolensk and reported everything to the Germans. A round-up followed. Thirty persons were arrested, out of whom eleven were shot. But that was the only round-up we ever had under the Germans and it lasted only one night."

"Good. Let us go on with the story."

"When speaking of the summer of 1942," continued Krivozhertzov, "let me say that it was then that I first heard of the murder of the Polish prisoners being talked about again. During that summer, some Polish prisoners were brought into our district. They had been enrolled in the 'Todt' organization and lived in railway wagons near Brecavo Mosta, the junction of the two railway lines of which I have spoken. They were employed in an iron salvage campaign. A certain Alexander Jegorov, who was a friend of mine, said to me one day: 'Do you know these Poles have discovered the graves of their countrymen? You remember—those that were shot in 1940!'

"I nodded and we changed the subject.

"At the beginning of 1943, the German terror slackened. They were retreating all along the front and things began to go from bad to worse for them. In Smolensk, pamphlets were published in Russian which were supposed to gain the sympathy of the population. I admit

I was keen to read those papers because we had been deprived of printed news for so long. That doesn't mean I took to the Germans. It was impossible after all I had seen and heard of them. But I hated Bolshevism just as much—as much as my father had—a hatred which had cost him his life. One day I read in one of these papers that on the Soviet side a Polish Army was being formed, but that General Sikorski was at a loss to know what had happened to his officers.

“I frankly admit that it was I who informed the Germans of the mass crime committed in Katyn forest.

“I remember it as well as if it had been yesterday. I folded the paper, thrust in into my pocket and went to see the German Security Authorities (*Geheime Feld-polizei*) in Gniezdovo. The chief officer there was called Voss. I asked for the interpreter and said: ‘Sikorski is looking for his officers and they are all here, buried in the Kosogory wood.’

“I was so excited that the indifference of the interpreter as he heard the news made me very angry. When leaving, I told them: ‘If you don't believe me, I'll dig them up myself.’

“Upon which Voss told the interpreter to withdraw. But I didn't start digging them up. Winter had started, and some two weeks went by. One day after I had returned from work, a neighbour came to see me and told me that the interpreter from the German Police had searched for me during the day and I was ordered to report to the Police next morning.

“It was on the 17th or maybe the 18th of February that I went to the German Police Station. Besides myself, they had also summoned Ivan Andreyev and Gregory Vasilkov. The latter was a member of the local militia, the so-called *Ordnungsdienst*. We were loaded into a cart with some spades and picks, and driven towards Kosogory. A German NCO and the interpreter preceded us on a motor-bicycle. They waited for us

to catch up with them at the entrance of the wood, and then escorted us to the *datcha*. A few other German soldiers were there already. The interpreter beckoned to one of them and asked him something. He shook his head. Upon which the interpreter turned to me.

"It was you who told us that there were Polish officers buried in this wood. Well then! Now show us where."

I answered that I knew that they were here but that I couldn't tell the exact position of the graves. Andreyev interrupted me: 'Kisielev will know that. He lives near by.'

"Then go and fetch him,' ordered the interpreter.

"I ran. Kisielev was sleeping on the stove. When told what was wanted, he was willing to help.

"Of course I know where they are,' he said. 'Last summer those Poles already had dug up the place.'

"And now we shall dig them up again,' I told him.

"It's long overdue. It's like a sin weighing on our conscience.' Kisielev was a very pious man. We all followed him as he led us to a certain spot which he pointed out with these words.

"There you are.'

"It was the largest of the mass graves. Only now I noticed the uneven edges and the difference from the adjoining soil. But otherwise the place had been masked by overturned trees and the little pines planted all over it. We started digging. It wasn't an easy job because of the frozen earth. Sweat trickled down my collar. I threw off my sheepskin and it was then that I noticed a roughly carved cross made out of birch wood.

"Where did that cross come from?' I asked Kisielev.

"There's another one over there,' he answered; 'the Poles put them up last year.'

"It does stink awfully here,' shouted Andreyev suddenly, who was working at the bottom of the pit we were digging. Vasilkov drew our attention to the fact that the earth was black although everywhere else the

soil was sandy. He also entered the pit but couldn't stand the stink. I returned to work, removed the black earth and underneath discovered a body clad in a military coat. I bent down and tore off a button with an eagle emblem.

" 'There you are.' I turned to the interpreter and handed him the button. He pocketed it, told us to stop digging and ordered us all to return to Gniezdovo.

" But when Voss learned of our discovery, he ordered us once more to the Kosogory wood. With his own hands he lifted one of the heads of the uncovered bodies, took a good look at it, and then told us to cover up the bodies with a thin layer of sand. We were ordered to report to the Police Office and Voss himself departed to Smolensk.

" That day we were told to make our first statements, which were taken down in writing by a police official. He was called Gustav Plonka and came from Vienna. Vasilkov got scared of the possible consequences and refused to sign his statement. We were all aware that by signing them we were signing our death sentences at the hands of the Soviet authorities. And on the front the Germans were steadily losing ground . . . But Plonka didn't insist and let Vasilkov go. After he left, Andreyev hesitated in turn. I urged him : ' Go on and sign. I am going to tell the whole truth and set my signature to it.'

" That persuaded him and he also signed his statement. A couple of days later, we were called to give further and more detailed evidence. The Germans had already organized a whole investigation and they were gathering evidence from as many people as they could.

" After a week or so, they began to dig up the graves systematically. I undertook to canvass among the local population for workers who would agree to help in the exhumation work. From then on, I spent most of my time in Kosogory and watched the whole work till



the fend. All sorts of commissions, delegations and excursions were brought to the graves. When they questioned us, the Germans deliberately withdrew except for the interpreter. Later on, they even told us to choose our own interpreter so as to avoid any suspicion of pressure being exercised. And so we chose Eugeniusz Siemianenko, the son of a local inhabitant, Emilia Siemianenko, who was Polish by birth. Her maiden name had been Kozłowska. They lived in Nove Batioki. The Germans didn't press us at all as to the evidence we gave, and we were allowed to talk to any of the visiting delegates.

"If they had tortured or beaten anyone, I should certainly have known of it. They never touched anybody. Why should they? We were only telling the truth. And for once, the truth was to their liking. As for old Kisielev, I can confirm that he heard excellently with both ears, both at that time and later on, in spite of being so old. And there was nothing wrong with either of his hands. The last time I saw him was on the 24th of September, 1943. He was saying goodbye to me and we shook hands. In his left hand he held a little bundle and also the handle of a wheelbarrow. That proves that there was nothing wrong with his arms. That to-day he is as deaf as a stone and has had both his arms broken does not surprise me in the least. What does astonish me is that he lives at all . . . if he does really still live. And I can tell why.

"Nothing happened to any of us who gave evidence then with the exception of Alexander Jegorov. He was permanently employed at the exhumation work and used to steal anything of value that he found in the pockets or boots of the dead men. He managed to gather some golden coins and rings. They caught him red-handed, and shot him.\* As to all the others who gave

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\* The Soviet communiqué maintains that the cause of execution was his alleged remarks doubting the authenticity of the German version.

evidence, we were taken one day to Grushchenka where our statements were taken down on gramophone records and where we had to answer on oath in the presence of a German Judge.

"While all this was happening, the slow but persistent retreat of the German Army was taking place. The front drew nearer and nearer to our district. With every day and every night, the rumbling of artillery fire on the eastern horizon grew louder. What was going to happen to us if the Bolsheviki returned? Especially to those who had disclosed the crime and told the truth on oath? Our neighbours shook their heads. 'Gloomy outlook for you, eh?' they used to say. From every corner came warnings of the fate which awaited us. We were advised by most to pack up and escape.

"All of a sudden these talks and hints stopped. On the contrary, here and there words of comfort and reassurance came, though nobody knew how they started. We were even encouraged to remain. I was not going to be taken in so easily. To-day it is beyond doubt that instructions were sent from beyond the fighting fronts to agents of the Communist party to retain those who knew anything about the Katyn crime, and at all costs keep those who had given evidence before the German authorities. They were very keen to lay hands on us. One day I met Sergei Mikolayev in the Borough Council. I knew him to be a communist. He drew me aside and whispered: 'You, Ivan, there's no reason for you to leave. You've got nothing to be afraid of—we'll stand up for you.'

" 'I shall think it over,' I answered.

"Another time, I paid a visit to old Kisielev. I found there another communist and Party candidate, Timofei Sergeivitch. He was excitedly discussing things with the old man. I sat down on the bench, and then for a time we chatted idly. In the end I turned to Kisielev.

“ ‘ Well, what about you, Partemon ? Are you staying or going ?’

Sergeivitch never allowed him to get a word in.

“ ‘ Of course, Kisielev is going to stay,’ he answered hurriedly. ‘ He is old and nobody will do him any harm. He will be able to say that the Germans forced him to give evidence and that’ll be the end of it.’ ”

“ Later on, I noticed that some one was always loitering around Kisielev. Most of them that I actually knew were communists, but some were complete strangers. Undoubtedly the old man knew more than all the others, and they concentrated their efforts upon him. He was surrounded by agents, and in the end he did remain in their hands . . . They must have given him hell in the NKVD because he was a man of strong principles, pious, and he always liked to tell the truth.

“ I think it was on the next day that I went to see Matvei Zacharov, who had held the post of Bailiff at Nove Batioki during the German occupation, and had also given evidence on the Katyn crime. He was my uncle, being my mother’s brother. My aunt poured me out a glass of vodka and whispered very secretly : ‘ They came from the partisans and told us to stay behind. They said that not a hair of our heads should be touched. It’s up to them to make sure that we shall be safe.’

“ ‘ Maybe. As to me, I think it’s high time to get moving,’ I said.

“ ‘ Oh, go on with you, Vanka !’ shouted my aunt. You think you are clever ! Take it from me, you’re stupid ! We shall stay.’

“ I was also coaxed to remain. It was always the same song. ‘ You will state that the Germans beat you up, that they forced it out of you by torture. You can maintain that you gave evidence under duress or even under drugs.’ It even went so far that one morning Ivan Andreyev came to me with the following proposition : ‘ I have some one I know in my cottage. He’s

been sent by the partisans in the forest. He sincerely urges us to escape to them and take to the woods while the Germans are still here. They'll take care of us, till the Red Army comes.'

" 'You mean till the NKVD takes over !' Andreyev scratched his head while I went on : 'Have you gone crazy ? Don't you know what they will do to us ? Even if not for giving evidence to the Germans, it's quite enough for them that we know the truth !'

"In the end Andreyev also decided to escape before the Bolsheviks came. He managed to persuade the interpreter of Voss, who took him with him. But they hadn't enough room to take me with them. Two days later I collected my mother and my little niece, and we begged a German lorry convoy to give us a lift.

"In Minsk I met once more Andreyev and Eugeniusz Siemianenko. I've got no idea what happened to them later. I had to part from my mother in Germany, and well . . . here I am . . . a wandering tramp."

"One more important question. How many bodies were there in Katyn ?"

"Isn't that well known enough ! A little over four thousand."

"And what about that eighth grave ?"

"Oh, that was quite a small one. The Germans covered it up again."

After a while, he added, looking at me : "But surely you were there, yourself ?"

"Yes," I answered. "It all fits together."

\* \* \* \* \*

That, then, is the story of a witness who could have thrown light in the case when it was brought before the Tribunal of Human Justice. He will never be able to tell it again because Ivan Krivozhertzov is dead. He died in a free country but whether the causes of his death were natural is another question. Whatever

the answer to it, his death must have caused great relief in certain quarters where it was known what bearing his evidence would have if ever the Katyn case was suddenly brought once again before a Tribunal. Because this case, in spite of its having been already brought to Court, cannot be dismissed as a *Res Judicata*. The extraordinary thing about it is that at the Nuremberg Trial the defendants were neither found guilty nor were they acquitted of this crime. It was not discussed for lack of evidence. The Prosecuting side never withdrew it from the indictment. It was simply lost. There is no mention of it in the verdict. From a legal point of view this is a curiosity. I leave it to the reader to draw his conclusions. That is the main reason for which this book has been written.

## XVI

### WHERE WERE THE OTHER PRISONERS MURDERED ?

**T**HE riddle of the Katyn murder has been solved. It is now known *who* had been murdered, how *many* had been murdered, and above all, *who* had murdered them.

Over four thousand Polish prisoners of war, mostly officers who had been former inmates of Kozielsk camp, had been shot by the Bolsheviks in the spring of 1940.

As the total number of missing Polish prisoners amounted to approximately fifteen thousand (or fourteen thousand five hundred) of whom about 10,000 had been imprisoned not in Kozielsk, but in the camps at Ostashkov and Starobielsk, the question which had already been asked, remains. What has happened to the other prisoners who were not murdered at Katyn, and had disappeared in a similar way from the latter two camps ? Not one of the missing ten thousand had ever given any sign of life since the spring of 1940, in spite of the most determined investigation and search. Therefore there can be little doubt that they were also exterminated—exterminated in 1940 on Soviet territory, which meant by the Soviet authorities.

This brings us face to face with a new atrocity of even greater size. We know the approximate number of victims. We know the culprit. But we do not know the place of the crime nor the circumstances in which it was committed.

# THE FATE OF THE PRISONERS FROM OSTASHKOV

On the 26th of April, 1943, a woman named Katarzyna Gaszciecka reported to the Record Office No. 5 of the Polish Army which had succeeded in crossing the border of the USSR. This woman was the wife of one of the missing Polish officers and she was also one of the many Polish citizens deported from Poland by the Soviet authorities. She told the following story.

"In June, 1941, among a crowd of four thousand men and women all deported from Poland, I was shipped over the White Sea. We were sailing from Archangielsk to the estuary of the Peczora River. They were sending us for further slave-labour and for further misery. I was sitting on the deck of the barge. While watching the receding shore, I suddenly felt a bitter yearning to be free again, to see my own country, to know what had happened to my husband, to—live again . . . I began to cry. It attracted the attention of a young Russian soldier, a member of the crew, who came up to me and asked: 'Here, you! What are you wailing about?'

" 'My fate. Is that also forbidden in this free country of yours? I'm crying over my husband's fate.'

" 'And who was he?'

" 'A Captain.'

" 'The Bolshevik burst into scornful laughter.

" 'Your tears won't help him any more. All your officers have been drowned here. In this very sea.' And he meaningly thumped the deck with his heel. Then he cynically told me that he himself had taken part in the convoy which had transported about seven thousand people, mostly Polish officers and members of the Police Force. They were towed out in two barges. Once in the open sea, the barges were cut adrift and sunk. 'All went straight to the bottom,' he ended, and went away.

"While he was speaking to me, another, older man, also a Russian, came up and stood near us. He also belonged to the crew of our barge but he wasn't a soldier. When the other man had gone away, the old man came up to me and, leaning over the railing, said a few comforting words in a low voice.

"'It's true what you have just heard. I also saw it with my own eyes. The crew was taken off, into the towing ship. The barges had been pierced through. It was an awful sight.' He actually wiped away a tear and sighed . . . 'No one could have saved himself.'"

This story does roughly corroborate the details gathered about the fate of the prisoners from Ostashkov Camp. First of all it is curious that the Polish Police Force should be mentioned because all the policemen were kept in Ostashkov. Further, the number of "about seven thousand" quoted by the Russians comes close to the number of the prisoners in that camp, of which there were over six thousand. We also know that Police Constable Woronecki—one of the lucky prisoners from Ostashkov who was sent to Giazoviec and thence out of Russia—had also heard it mentioned by the camp guards that the other prisoners had been drowned. The statement made by Police Sergeant J.B., although it does not mention drowning, points to the north as the direction in which the Ostashkov prisoners were taken when they disappeared.

There is proof that they had been sent to a station called Bologoje which lies north from Ostashkov, but what happened to them later on?

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At the time when the Polish Army was being organized on Soviet territory, a time to be always remembered for its feverish searching, and the vain attempts at re-assembling the missing thousands, there were many stories



of Polish prisoners being either seen or heard about somewhere in the North—tales about some undefined accident having taken place in the White Sea. Originally it was commonly assumed that all the Polish prisoners had been deported to the far North. The discovery of the Katyn graves cut short this flow of hazy surmises. It also became known by then that Polish prisoners had, in fact, been sent to the North in 1940, but these were not prisoners from any of the three camps in question, but those who had been previously interned in the Baltic States. And those who came from the Baltic States, although deported to the North, had not been murdered.

Up till now, there has not been sufficient evidence gathered to come to any definite conclusion and it cannot be claimed with any certainty that the Polish prisoners from Ostashkov had really been drowned in the White Sea. The evidence supplied by Mrs. Katarzyna Gaszciecka is undoubtedly important but far from being sufficient proof. Although if the prisoners from Ostashkov had really been sent to Archangielsk, their way would actually have led through Bologoje. But . . .

Logically, the theory of their drowning seems improbable. As is known, the fate of all three camps, both during their existence and in the method of their disbandment, was identical. The similar way in which all the prisoners were treated makes it nearly certain that their fate was decided by the very same order issued from above, which probably did not only decree their deaths, but the method by which their executions were to take place.

From that point of view, it would seem absurd to murder the prisoners from Kozielsk in a relatively small wood in the densely populated Smolensk district, and at the same time transport over six thousand prisoners from Ostashkov all the way to Archangielsk, in order

to drown them in the White Sea. Why bother, when it would be so much easier to dispose of them in the same way as had been done at Katyn—just shoot them somewhere? There are immeasurable forests in which it would be much easier to lose all traces of them than in that little wood in the Smolensk area.

These reasons therefore seem to point to the conclusion that the prisoners from Ostashkov lie buried not far from some small railway station, just as the prisoners from Kozielsk lie not far from the Gniezdovo station.

### THE FATE OF THE "STAROBIELSK" CAMP

Where did the 3,500 Polish officers from Starobielsk disappear? The only answer can also be found by drawing a parallel.

We already know that the last traces left by the transports evacuating the prisoners from Starobielsk are to be found at Kharkov railway junction. Beyond that, all trace ceases. "All your men are unloaded here," said the Soviet railway worker. Perhaps he told the truth. Perhaps it was a lie . . . It was not a very satisfactory clue. Perhaps a little nearer or a little further away, they also lie with their skulls pierced by the infallible bullet, and their bodies pressed together under the earth of a great common grave on which little pine trees have been planted . . .

## XVII

### THE LIE OF THE SOVIET COMMUNIQUÉ

**A**S is already known, the Soviet Government has made several announcements in which it denies all responsibility for the Katyn murder. The official Soviet version maintains that this murder of thousands of Polish officers was committed by the Germans.

After the retreat of the Germans from Smolensk, in whose neighbourhood lies Katyn, a "Special Commission" arrived in the city having been officially authorized by the Soviet Government to make investigations. As a result of this investigation which it was supposed to have carried out, the "Special Commission" issued a communiqué.

It must be added that when staging this "inquest," the Soviet authorities invited a score of foreign journalists who were brought on an excursion from Moscow to "see for themselves." We quote here the opinion of a well-known American author and journalist, Mr. W. L. White, who in his book *Report on the Russians*, pp. 133—134, published in New York in 1945, comments as follows on the visit of the foreign correspondents to Katyn:

... Most of the Anglo-American correspondents—trained observers—believed, even before they went, that the Germans had done the killing.

It was difficult to say with certainty when they had been shot but an observant reporter noticed that one Polish body was clad in long heavy underwear, and mentioned it to the Soviet doctor in charge. The

doctor remarked that most of the bodies wore either heavy underwear, or overcoats, or both.

That seemed to point to the theory that these Poles must have been shot during April, 1940, as the Germans claimed, rather than in August and September, 1941, after the Germans moved in, as the Soviet Government was contending.

When this point was raised with the Soviet conducting officers, there was considerable confusion and the Russians finally argued that the climate of Poland is uncertain, so that fur overcoats and long underwear might be worn in September.

The reporters preferred to believe the stories of their Allies in which most evidence pointed towards German guilt. Even so, Moscow censorship struck out all qualifying phrases.

If a reporter would write "*I am not a medical expert but doctors say* the condition of these bodies proves that they were murdered by the Germans"—the censorship would strike out the qualifying phrase (which I have italicized) leaving only the bare charge.

Also stricken out were all phrases indicating any doubt in the correspondents' minds—such words as "in my opinion," "probably" or "evidence we were shown would tend to prove," with the result that the stories as received in America were as firmly damning of the Germans as *Pravda's* editorials.

The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the falsehood of the Soviet communiqué. One by one, all the major arguments and proofs on which the Soviet version is based, will be examined and their inconsistency brought to light. The quoted texts of the Soviet communiqué are taken verbatim from its version published in 1944 in London by the *Soviet War News*.

From the analysis which follows, much of which is already known to the reader, it will be seen that the

communiqué published by the Russians can scarcely claim to have attained its end—the proclamation of the innocence of the Soviet Union in regard to the Katyn massacre.

### 1. COMPOSITION OF THE SOVIET COMMISSION

The Soviet communiqué starts with the following introduction :

#### THE TRUTH ABOUT KATYN.

REPORT OF SPECIAL COMMISSION FOR ASCERTAINING AND INVESTIGATING THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE SHOOTING OF THE POLISH OFFICER PRISONERS BY THE GERMAN-FASCIST INVADERS IN THE KATYN FOREST.

The special commission for ascertaining and investigating the circumstances of the shooting of the Polish Officer prisoners by the German-Fascist invaders in the Katyn Forest (near Smolensk) was set up on the decision of the Extraordinary State Commission for ascertaining and investigating crimes committed by the German-Fascist invaders and their associates.

The Commission consists of: Member of the Extraordinary State Commission, Academician Burdenko (Chairman of the Commission); Member of the Extraordinary State Commission, Academician Alexei Tolstoy; Member of the Extraordinary State Commission, the Metropolitan Nikolai; President of the All-Slav Committee, Lt. Gen. Dundorov; Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Union of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Kolesnikov; People's Commissar of Education of the Russian S.F.S.R., Academician Potemkin; The Chief of the Central Medical Administration of the Red

Army, Col. Gen. Smirnov; the Chairman of the Smolensk Regional Executive Committee, Melnikov.

To accomplish the task assigned to it, the Commission invited the following medico-legal experts to take part in its work: Chief Medico-Legal Expert of the People's Commissariat of Health Protection of the USSR, Director of Scientific Research in the Institute of Forensic Medicine, Prozorovsky; the Head of the Faculty of Forensic Medicine at the Second Moscow Medical Institute, Doctor of Medicine Smolyaninov; Senior Staff Scientists of the State Scientific Research Institute of Forensic Medicine under the People's Commissariat of Health of the USSR, Semenovskiy and assistant Professor Shvaikova; Chief Pathologist of the Front, Mjr. of Medical Service, Professor Voropayev.

The Special Commission had at its disposal, extensive material presented by the member of the Extraordinary State Commission, Academician Burdenko, his collaborators, and the medico-legal experts, who arrived in Smolensk on the 26th of September, 1943, immediately upon its liberation and carried out preliminary study and investigation of the circumstances of all the crimes perpetrated by the Germans.

The introduction to the communiqué contains a list of the members of the Soviet "Special Commission." Any comment upon the character of this body should begin by stressing the fact that while the analogous Commission formed by the Germans for the same purpose was mainly composed of professors from Germany's vassal countries, representatives of neutral countries also took part in its proceedings. It should be added that the German Government did not object to the participation of the International Red Cross Society's representatives in their Commission; on the contrary,

they were invited to co-operate with the Commission. The Polish Government also addressed a special request to the International Red Cross Society, asking it to investigate the Katyn crime. Thus, nobody, not even the Germans, stood in the way of the matter being given into the hands of a neutral and unbiassed committee of the International Red Cross, an organization of generally recognized authority. Only the Soviet Government objected to this; their attitude made an entirely impartial examination of the crime impossible.

Instead of this, the Soviet Government preferred to form its own Commission a year later. As the reader can judge from the quoted introduction of the Soviet communiqué, all the members were Soviet citizens of Russian nationality. The Commission did not include Poles or any other persons of foreign nationality. In view of this, the statement of the Commission cannot be considered as objective and unbiassed, for, as is generally known, Soviet citizens are not free to express personal opinions. Furthermore, the aim for which the Commission was actually created debars it from being taken as evidence. It was described "for ascertaining and investigating the circumstances of the shooting of the Polish Officer prisoners by the German-Fascist invaders . . ." and not for ascertaining *who* shot these Polish officers.

## 2. FALSE NUMBER OF DEAD

In the next paragraph of the same introduction we read :

The Special Commission verified and ascertained on the spot that 15 km. from Smolensk, along the Vitebsk highway, in the section of the Katyn Forest named "Kozie Gory," 200 metres to the south-west of the highway in the direction of the Dniepr, there

are graves in which the Polish War Prisoners shot by the German occupationists were buried.

On the order of the Special Commission and in the presence of all its members and of the medico-legal experts, the graves were excavated. A large number of bodies clad in Polish military uniforms were found in the graves. The total number of bodies, as calculated by the medico-legal experts, is 11,000. The medico-legal experts made detailed examinations of the exhumed bodies and of documents and material evidence discovered on the bodies and in the graves.

We find in this paragraph the *a priori* conclusion that the Polish War Prisoners were shot by the Germans repeated again. And that there were 11,000 of them. This is not true. The total number of bodies found at Katyn does not exceed 4,500.

The false number was first given by the Germans who must have known something of the efforts of both the Polish Government and the Polish military authorities in Russia to locate about 15,000 missing Polish prisoners of war, including 9,000 officers. The Germans, having discovered the Katyn graves and being convinced that all the officers had been killed in that place, gave the number of bodies as 10,000; this they established, after a hurried estimation of the graves before the removal of the bodies, and later they changed the figure to *between* 10,000 and 12,000.

As the Germans published these revelations to suit their own political ends and to foster anti-Soviet feeling, it was obviously in their interest to give as high a number of dead as possible. Having tuned their propaganda to such a high pitch, they could not afterwards reduce the number of bodies to half or even a third of the original figure without compromising their original statement. This surely was their reason for concealing the actual number of bodies found. It was never mentioned by them.



The Soviet Government could not have known that the Polish Underground had been informed of the true number, so when their version gave the figure of 11,000, they never expected to be challenged on this point. The German version was very convenient for the Soviet Government; it solved the disappearance of all the missing Polish prisoners. Even if it could be proved that "Katyn was done by the Germans" and at the same time publish the true number of victims, awkward questions regarding the fate of the other missing prisoners would inevitably be asked. And these awkward questions would have to be answered by the Soviet Government. It was to avoid them, that the Soviet Commission maintained the false figure of 11,000 bodies.

### 3. THE KATYN FOREST

Under this heading the Soviet communiqué declares :

The population of the neighbourhood grazed cattle and gathered fuel in the Katyn Forest. Access to the Katyn Forest was not banned or restricted in any way. This situation prevailed in the Katyn Forest up to the outbreak of war.

This statement is obviously meant to mislead the reader who has no knowledge of the topography of the area. The name "Katyn Forest" has been commonly accepted as the name of the place where the crime was committed. This expression, however, has an extensive meaning, as Katyn is a region of some considerable size comprising many wooded areas. The name "Katyn Forest" may therefore refer to "Kozie Gory" (Kosogory or the Goat Hills) where the crime was committed, but it may also apply to some other area. The Soviet communiqué does not avoid the name "Kozie Gory", on the contrary it uses it often. But it does not state that the population of the neighbour-

hood grazed their cattle and gathered fuel on "Kozie Gory" but merely *in* the Katyn Forest which might be true, but does not alter the fact that the local population was not allowed near the scene of the crime. The "Kozie Gory" proper is the area which surrounds the rest home for NKVD officials, and it has been used for a considerable time as a place of execution. This has not only been proved by the evidence of the local population, but also by the fact that numerous human remains in various stages of decomposition were dug out in 1943, and as far as can be judged by what is left of their clothes, the executed were Soviet citizens.

#### 4. POLISH PRISONERS OF WAR IN THE SMOLENSK AREA

Under this heading, the Soviet communiqué states :

The Special Commission established that, before the capture of Smolensk by the Germans, Polish War prisoners, officers and men, worked in the Western district of the Region, building and repairing roads. These war prisoners were quartered in three special camps named Camp No. 1.O.N., Camp No. 2.O.N., and Camp No. 3.O.N. These camps were located 25-45 km. to the West of Smolensk.

The testimony of witnesses and documentary evidence establish the fact that after the outbreak of hostilities, in view of the situation that arose, the camps could not be evacuated in time and all the Polish war prisoners, as well as some members of the guard and the staff of the camps, fell prisoner to the Germans.

The former Chief of Camp 1 O.N., Major of State Security Vetoshnikov, interrogated by the Special Commission, testified: "I was waiting for the order on the removal of the camp, but communication with

Smolensk was cut. Then I myself with several staff members went to Smolensk to clarify the situation. In Smolensk, I found a tense situation. I applied to the chief of traffic of the Smolensk section of the Western Railway, Ivanov, asking him to provide the camp with railway cars for the evacuation of the Polish war prisoners. But Ivanov answered that I could not count on receiving cars. I also tried to get in touch with Moscow to obtain permission to set out on foot, but I failed. By this time Smolensk was already cut off from the camp by the Germans, and I did not know what happened to the Polish war prisoners and the guards who remained in the camp."

Engineer Ivanov, who in July, 1941, was acting as Chief of Traffic of the Smolensk Section of the Western Railway, testified before the Special Commission: "The Administration of Polish War Prisoners' Camps applied to my office for cars for the evacuation of Poles, but we had none to spare. Besides, we could not send cars to the Gussino line where the majority of the Poles were, since the line was already under fire. Therefore, we could not comply with the request of the Camp Administration. Thus the Polish war prisoners remained in the Smolensk region."

This statement is an obvious lie as the officers killed at Katyn had never been interned in camps in the vicinity of Smolensk. It is significant that while the Soviet communiqué gives the numbers of the camps and their distance from Smolensk (25 to 45 km.) it does not mention the names of these localities where the camps were to be found. The communiqué also omits to say when these camps had been established and when the Polish prisoners had been moved to them, nor does it give any reason for calling these camps "special."

In addition to this, the statement is in direct contra-

diction to the explanations previously received by General Sikorski, General Anders, Ambassador Kot and Captain Czapski, all of whom had approached the highest Soviet officials. Evidence to this effect is in the possession of the Polish Government-in-exile and it also is known to the competent British authorities. This evidence establishes the fact that until the German discovery at Katyn, neither Stalin nor any other representative of the highest Soviet authorities ever made any allusion to any Polish prisoners' camps near Smolensk, despite their allegations that their search embraced such distant regions as the Manchurian frontier and Francis Joseph Land.

It is therefore quite clear that the evidence given by Major Vetoshnikov, the NKVD Commander of "Camp No. 1. O.N.", has no relation to the truth. Vetoshnikov testified that he had asked the Director of the Smolensk railway to give him transport facilities for the evacuation of the prisoners; Ivanov's confirmation of this request is just as improbable. Anyone acquainted with conditions of life in the Soviet Union and especially with the methods of the NKGB and the NKVD could see at once that 11,000 (as the Soviet version will have it) Polish officer prisoners could not have been in camps near Smolensk not far from Moscow while a nation-wide search was being organized for them by Stalin, Molotov, Vyshinsky, General Raychman of the NKVD and Nasiedkin, O.C. of all camps in Russia (*Gulag*), and by many others, which went on without any result for two years, with the Director of the Smolensk Railway, Ivanov, and Vetoshnikov knowing all the time where the missing prisoners were. Such a situation is absolutely impossible. Vetoshnikov admitted to being evacuated to the interior of Russia at the time of the German advance and therefore must have remained in contact with his superior officers. Allegedly he made some efforts to contact Moscow from

Smolensk without success, but it is clear that after his departure from the city it would have been his duty to report to the competent authorities about the fate of the Polish prisoners entrusted to his care. If the camp had really existed, he must surely have done this, and the Soviet authorities would have had a report on the matter as early as August, 1941.

Furthermore, it seems highly improbable that the Soviet authorities who had been unable to find the missing 11,000 in the course of several years, could publish detailed information about the camps near Smolensk, barely twenty-four hours after the German radio announcement. And yet the communiqué of the "Sovinformbureau" broadcast on the 15th and 17th of April, 1943, told the world of the existence of these camps, how they had been occupied by the Germans who subsequently shot the prisoners, falsified their documents, and other detailed information of what took place on German-occupied territory.

This might have been guess-work, but it was miraculously confirmed by the communiqué of the Special Commission. This leads us to believe that both the broadcasts and the text of the communiqué which related to the camps near Smolensk were the work of the same hand, and their texts were decided upon long before the Soviet Commission reached Katyn.

##### 5. WHY THE PRISONERS WERE TAKEN TO GNIEZDOVO ?

Another circumstance which impairs the validity of the Soviet Statement relating to the existence of camps near Smolensk is the taking of the Polish prisoners to Gniezdovo railway station. There was no reason to take prisoners to this station which was 12 km. from Smolensk if the authorities intended them for camps 25-45 km. beyond Smolensk. One would imagine that stations further down the line would be much

more convenient for unloading the prisoners, and one cannot see the purpose of transporting the prisoners in motor lorries for 12 to 32 km. when it would have been so much simpler to let them continue in the train two or three stations further west. This surely would have happened had the prisoners been really sent to such camps and not to the place of execution in the Katyn Forest, only 3 km. from Gniezdovo.

## 6. THE EVACUATION OF THE CAMPS

Returning to the testimony of Major Vetoshnikov, relating to his efforts to evacuate the camps, what is striking is the complete lack of conformity between his story and the usual Soviet practice of evacuating prisoners which is described in some detail in Chapter VI. This contradiction becomes even more marked if the situation on the front at that time is taken into account.

The Soviet war communiqué of July 16th, 1941, said: "In the Vitebsk area the enemy's efforts to penetrate further east have failed."

We must remember that according to the Soviet version, the three "special" camps for Polish prisoners were situated at a distance of some 25 to 45 km. west of Smolensk, i.e. about 80-100 km. east of Vitebsk. But even on the 18th of July, 1941, the Soviet communiqué claimed:

"Smolensk is still held by us . . ."

And now a question—when did Major Vetoshnikov approach Ivanov with his request? The Soviet communiqué does not give the exact date but we find it in the Polish Communist Journal *Free Poland* whose Moscow Special Correspondent was a certain Jerzy Borejsza. In his article entitled "On the trail of the Crime" he writes:

"On the 12 of July, 1941, he (Ivanov) was asked to give railway cars by the Commandant of one of the camps."

That was on the 12th July. But the situation on that section of the front on that date, and probably as late as the 15th, was such that the prisoners from these camps could have been evacuated on foot, if not by train, without any difficulty. The prisoners could easily have reached Smolensk in one day, and then would have had plenty of time to proceed further towards Moscow, under the protection of the army which was defending Smolensk till the 28th of July. Examples quoted in Chapter VI show us that the evacuation of other camps had often been carried out under much more difficult circumstances.

#### 7. ALL CORRESPONDENCE STOPPED

That the murder of the prisoners took place in the spring of 1940 and not in the autumn of 1941, and therefore they could not have been working on the roads near Smolensk at the later date as the Soviet communiqué would have us believe, is confirmed by the fact that none of the relatives of those interned in Koziesk, Starobielsk and Ostashkov ever received any letters or news after the spring of 1940. Many of the letters addressed to these officers were returned by the Soviet Postal Service bearing the stamp: "*Retour—Parti.*"

Captain Czapski, in his book, *Reminiscences of Starobielsk*, relates that the handful of Polish prisoners who survived and were assembled in the Griazoviec Camp received many letters from Poland, written by those who were making frantic efforts to find out what had happened to their relatives with whom they had regularly corresponded until the spring of 1940. Then all correspondence had suddenly been interrupted. This can be confirmed by the families of the missing men in Poland, none of whom ever received a letter after May, 1940.

There was nothing to prevent these officers from corresponding with their families right up till the outbreak of the German-Soviet war, unless the Russians had prohibited them doing so. But neither in the communiqué nor from any other Soviet source can we find a trace of such an order; on the contrary, the Soviet communiqué states that letters dated much later than April, 1940, had been found on the bodies.

We quote in full the relevant paragraph entitled :

#### DOCUMENTS FOUND ON THE BODIES.

Besides the data recorded in the protocol of the Commission of medico-legal experts, the time of the shooting of the Polish officer prisoners by the Germans (autumn 1941 and not spring 1940 as the Germans assert) is also ascertained by the documents found when the graves were opened, dating not only from the latter half of 1940, but also the spring and summer (March-June) of 1941. Of these documents discovered by the medico-legal experts, the following deserve special attention.

1. On the body No. 92: A letter from Warsaw addressed to the Central War Prisoners' Bureau of the Red Cross, Moscow, Kuibyshev Street, House No. 12. The letter is written in Russian. In it, Sofia Zigon enquires the whereabouts of her husband Tomasz Zigon. The letter is dated September, 12th, 1940. The envelope bears the impress of a German rubber stamp "Warsaw September, 1940" and a rubber stamp "Moscow Central Post Office ninth delivery Sept. 28th, 1940," and an inscription in the Russian language: "Ascertain and forward for delivery, November 15th, 1940." (signature illegible.)

2. On body No. 4: A postcard registered under the number 0112 from Tarnopol stamped "Tarnopol



Nov. 12th, 1940." Written text and address are discoloured.

3. On body No. 101 : A receipt No. 10293 dated Dec. 19th, 1939, issued by the Kozielsk Camp testifying the receipt of a gold watch from Edward Adamovich Lewandowski. On the back of this receipt is a note dated March 14th, 1941, on the sale of this watch to the Jewellery Trading Trust.

4. On body No. 46 : A receipt (number illegible) issued Dec. 16th, 1939, by the Starobielsk Camp testifying receipt of a gold watch from Vladimir Rudolfovich Araszkievich. On the back of the receipt is a note dated March 25th, 1941, stating that the watch was sold to the Jewellery Trading Trust.

7. On body No. 171 : A small paper ikon with the image of Christ found between pages 114 and 115 of a Catholic prayer book. The inscription on the back of the ikon, with legible signature, reads "Jadwiga" and bears the date April 4th, 1941.

6. On body No. 46 : A receipt dated April 6th, 1941, issued by the Camp No. 1. O.N., showing receipt of a sum in roubles from Araszkievich.

7. On the same body No. 46 : A receipt dated May 5th, 1941, issued by Camp No. 1.O.N. showing receipt of 102 roubles from Araszkievich.

8. On body No. 101 : A receipt dated May 15th, 1941, issued by Camp No. 1. showing receipt of 175 roubles from Lewandowski.

9. On body No. 53 : An unmailed postcard in the Polish language addressed: Warsaw Bagatela, Flat 47, to Irene Kuczinska, and dated June 20th, 1941. The sender is Stanislaw Kuczinski.

This extract is very significant for two reasons: firstly, because it authoritatively establishes that there had been no order prohibiting correspondence, and secondly, because it is in manifest contradiction to the fact that

correspondence had actually ceased in the Spring of 1940. It should now be asked how did the Soviet Special Commission come into possession of the letters mentioned in 1, 2, and 9? But the explanation is simple. The letters mentioned had been sent from Poland and the Soviet Post Office had probably handed them over to the NKVD which retained them. Stanislaw Kuczynski's letter may also be genuine. It was written on the 20th of June, 1941, but never dispatched. Captain Kuczynski had not been interned in Kozielsk; he had been removed by the Russians from Starobielsk in December, 1939, and nobody ever saw him afterwards. It is probable he was kept in prison for some time and then executed separately, or he may have died in prison. All his belongings including the letter were taken over by the NKVD. Knowing the methods of this body, it would have been very easy for it to take these three letters from its files and send them to Katyn, or simply mention them.

The end of all correspondence in the spring of 1940 is also confirmed by the following reasons.

Common sense shows that the Germans would not have dared to "engineer the provocation" (in the words of the Soviet Report) by announcing that the prisoners had been murdered in the spring of 1940 had they had any indication that the families of the victims could have received letters from them with later dates. In such a case all these families would have been potential witnesses able to discredit the German propaganda campaign of 1943. It can be argued that the Germans were in a position to compel the silence of these families. But if the considerable number of the relatives of the 15,000 missing men is taken into account, it can be seen that this would be an extremely difficult thing to do, and there was always the possibility that some of these people had been deported or had fled to Russia before the advancing German armies; others might have

escaped abroad, or might have found some way of disclosing the fact that they *did* receive letters from their relatives in Russia later than the crucial date of spring, 1940.

#### 8. ROUND-UP OF POLISH WAR PRISONERS

The Soviet communiqué contains the following statement :

The presence of Polish war prisoners in the autumn of 1941 in Smolensk districts is also confirmed by the fact that the Germans made numerous round-ups of those war prisoners who had escaped from the camps.

Witness Kartoshkin, a carpenter, testified : " In the autumn of 1941 the Germans not only scoured the forests for Polish war prisoners, but also used police to make night searches in the villages."

Zakharov, former headman of the village Novye Bateki, testified that in the autumn of 1941 the Germans intensively "combed" the villages and forests in search of Polish prisoners. Witness Danilenkov, a peasant of the Krasnaya Zarya collective farm, testified : " Special round-ups were held in our place to catch Polish war prisoners who had escaped. Some searches took place in my house two or three times. After one such search I asked the headman, Konstantin Sergeyev, whom they had been looking for in our village ? Sergeyev said that an order had been received from the German Kommandantur according to which searches were to be made in all houses without exception since Polish war prisoners who had escaped from the camp were hiding in our village. After some time the searches were discontinued."

The witness, collective farmer Fatkov, testified : " Round-ups and searches for Polish prisoners took

place several times. That was in August and September, 1941. After September, 1941, the round-ups were discontinued and no one saw Polish war prisoners any more."

According to these statements, a large number of Polish prisoners had escaped from the camps, after being left behind by the Russians, and the camps having been taken over by the Germans. It is a matter of common knowledge that at that time the areas to the rear of the German front had not been brought under complete German control. Whole districts had been occupied by partisans. The great forests were used as hiding places. The official paper *Izvestia* thus describes the situation of the German army in the region of Smolensk :

Despite the fact that the best sons of Smolensk province went to war with the Red Army, many thousands of brave patriot partisans, answering Comrade Stalin's appeal, seized their arms and began a pitiless destruction of the German hordes. The partisans watched the enemy night and day ; they fought the Germans in the towns and in the country, they destroyed them at river crossings, they settled accounts with them on forest paths ; they carried out bold heroic attacks on objectives in the rear of the enemy, blasting bridges and depots.

And after the return of the Red Army :

" . . . people came out of the woods, crawled out of huts and holes . . . " (*Izvestia*, No. 224, September 22nd, 1945, " In the Province of Smolensk " by M. Isakovski.)

It is very hard to believe that in these regions which offered such opportunities to hide and escape no Polish officer from those alleged to have left the camps ever managed to make his way into Russia and join the army then being formed by General Anders. But there is

no living Polish officer who can truthfully say: "In the summer of 1941, I was in Katyn."

The false statement of the Soviet communiqué is shown up by Ivan Krivozhertzov, who stated that no such round-ups were made by the Germans in the autumn of 1941, nor was any search made for the Poles. Nobody had seen these Poles in the neighbourhood for the simple reason that they had never been there.

## 9. THE SOVIET WITNESSES

The Soviet communiqué presents the question in an entirely different light. According to it, not only Vetoshnikov and Ivanov, but many other witnesses had seen the Polish prisoners.

The presence of the Polish war prisoners in the camps in the Smolensk region is confirmed by the testimony of numerous witnesses who saw these Poles near Smolensk in the early months of the occupation up to September, 1941, inclusive.

Next comes the evidence of a witness, Shashneva, who saw Polish prisoners working on the roads during 1940-1941; later on other witnesses confirm this statement. The situation is treated in the communiqué as if the Polish camps were a matter of common knowledge. This only deepens the contrast between the communiqué and previous declarations of the Soviet officials who could not or did not want to give any definite answer when asked about the missing men. All this strengthens our suspicions that the persons mentioned as witnesses told lies.

But perhaps "lies" is not the right description for statements made by witnesses in Soviet Russia. The Soviet citizens' lack of liberty to express their own opinion when giving public testimony is well known to the

whole world. In this respect, the Soviet Union is unique, and it is absolutely impossible for any one within reach of the Soviet power to give evidence contrary to the requirements of the Soviet authorities. There are numerous ways and means to attain this end. Ivan Krivozhertzov gives many details which prove that the Soviet authorities, prior to their re-occupation of Smolensk and neighbourhood, had made all preparations to secure suitable testimony from the Katyn witnesses, and did their utmost to persuade them to remain where they were, so as to be able to lay hands on them. Kisielev's deafness and his broken arm can no doubt be traced to the return of the NKVD. In addition it must be stressed that many of the witnesses quoted in the Soviet communiqué are the same ones who appeared before the German Commission and the International Medical Commission; the evidence they gave then is quite contrary to the Soviet report.

#### 10. AUGUST-SEPTEMBER OR SEPTEMBER-DECEMBER ?

Those who have carefully read the Soviet communiqué may well come to the conclusion that the Soviet Special Commission did not hold the evidence of its own witnesses in high esteem. The reason for it, would be this :

Witness Fatkov testified that the "round-ups of Polish prisoners" organized by the Germans came completely to an end after September. In her evidence, Alekseyeva tells us that the Germans carried out the executions at the end of August; the same Alekseyeva and her friends, Mikhailova and Konochovskaya, on whose evidence rests the mysterious story of the "Staff of the 537 Work Battalion," testified together that the Polish prisoners had been shot in the months of August and September. The astronomer Bazylevsky tells of the conversation which he had with a certain Menshagin at the beginning of September. Then, "about two

weeks after this conversation . . . ” Menshagin said : “ They (the Poles) have already been dealt with.”

From these statements, it would be assumed that all the Polish prisoners had been shot by about September the 15th, and anyhow the majority of them in the month of August. But in spite of this evidence supplied by the witnesses who all said more or less the same, the communiqué of the Special Commission lightly passes over their statements and declares that : “ These shootings took place in a period about two years ago, i.e., between September and December.”

The contradiction between this statement and the evidence of the witnesses is obvious. The communiqué does not even mention the month August, although many witnesses had testified that it was the month during which the executions were carried out, and none of them mentioned anything about October, November or December. The text of the communiqué gives no possible explanation of the opinion of the experts who said September-December. Neither does it give any explanation why the month of August mentioned by most of the witness is omitted when the experts made their final estimate of the date of the execution.

This apparent mystery is, however, easily solved if we carefully put together a few facts which have been already described.

The Soviet version, which was first broadcast in April, 1943, insisted on the period August-September, 1941, as the time when the Germans had carried out their alleged execution of the Poles. As there is every reason to believe that the Commission's communiqué was prepared in advance long before it ever came to Katyn, it is also probable that the evidence of the witnesses was also drafted beforehand. There was general agreement as to the period August-September, if only to agree with the statements issued at the beginning of the controversy.

However something unforeseen happened ; the foreign press correspondents brought to Katyn at the time of the Commission's investigation there noticed that the bodies were clad in warm, winter clothes ; this discovery and the questions addressed to members of the Commission caused the utmost consternation amongst the Russians. It was justified, for, as everybody in that part of the world knows, such clothing can be worn in the neighbourhood of Smolensk till about the end of April, which seemed to confirm the German version as to the time of execution, which could hardly be August, when the weather is warm, even hot.

After several unsuccessful attempts to explain to the foreign correspondents that the weather near Smolensk was apt to undergo sudden changes of temperature—an explanation received with silent but visible scepticism—the situation was saved by the removal of the word "August" from the decision of the experts, changing it for autumn to December. But the evidence of the witnesses could not thus be changed at the last moment, hence the value of the evidence was impaired by the Commission itself.

## 11. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

However, all these arguments, although they incriminate the Soviet side, concern only secondary matters. Does any direct incriminating evidence exist ?

The investigation of the Katyn crime is not a search for completely unknown culprits. Even the most objective and unbiassed judge or observer is no longer in the position of the detective who knows nothing and suspects everybody. Such a mass murder could only be the work of some vast organization with unlimited means at its disposal—means which could be possessed only by the State. Therefore the culprit can be none other than the actual State whose jurisdiction extended



over the place of the crime, at the time when the crime was committed. In brief, if the time of the crime can be established, it also establishes the identity of the murderer.

Neither the confession of the criminal, nor the testimony of the witnesses, nor even scientific medical examination is really needed for an absolute proof—because the murdered men carried on their bodies all the evidence which was necessary. They carried on them evidence relating to their private lives in the form of letters, receipts, diaries and . . . newspapers. Newspapers published during a definite period of time. We may all carry such revealing papers with us. If a murdered man should be found in August with an April copy of *The Times* in his pocket, its date would be a significant clue, though it might not be sufficient proof that the man was murdered in April. But if the same detail is repeated over four thousand times in the case of such a mass murder, this detail acquires the character of documentary proof. And on all the bodies found at Katyn, the papers of every kind do not bear any date beyond May, 1940. In May, 1940, the Katyn district was under the administration of the Soviet Union . . .

We may quote legal formulae and indulge *ad infinitum* in discussion as to direct and secondary evidence, and debate similar matters, but one thing will remain certain: the sudden cessation of correspondence, and the enormous number of newspapers found on the bodies, none which bore a date later than the Spring of 1940, is irrefutable proof. How does the Soviet version deal with this?

In the first place, it tries to persuade us that documents were found on the bodies bearing a date later than May, 1940. This was only logical. The only answer to the evidence disclosed to the world by the Germans was: "You have been duped. You must either be insincere in maintaining that no letters, newspapers or any other

documents had later dates, or that the Germans skillfully withheld from you all papers dated later than May, 1940." To prove this the Soviet communiqué quotes nine items allegedly found on the dead bodies. Of these, only three are letters, which if shown, would be worth considering as genuine. But even if this could be proved, there is no direct evidence that they were taken from the bodies of the victims. No impartial witness saw them discovered at Katyn.

But after having produced this doubtful proof, the Russians themselves seemed to doubt that these letters could outweigh the thousands of other documents which the Germans showed to so many. They therefore decided to undermine the value of these latter documents. By doing so they admit the importance of the evidence brought to light by the Germans. And they also acknowledge that their nine documents alone are not convincing. How does the Soviet Commission try to refute the proof of the letters and newspapers?

It invents a new legend of the Germans having falsified these documentary proofs. The communiqué declares :

Along with the search for witnesses the Germans proceeded with the preparation of the graves in Katyn Forest : they removed from the clothing of the Polish officers whom they had killed all documents dated later than April, 1940—that is the time when, according to the German provocative version, the Poles were shot by the Bolsheviks—and removed all material evidence which could disprove this provocative version. In its investigation, the Special Commission revealed that for this purpose the Germans used up to 500 Russian war prisoners specially selected from war prisoners camp No. 126.

In this paragraph the Soviet authorities admit that no documents dated later than April, 1940, were found on

the bodies. Instead of challenging this evidence directly, the Soviet Commission brings forward evidence that the whole thing had been fabricated beforehand by the Nazis. What is this evidence?

## 12. THE 500 MYSTERIOUS PRISONERS.

They allege that 500 Russian prisoners from Camp No. 126 had been used to dig up the bodies, remove all documents dated later than April, 1940, replace them by other papers dated April, 1940, and then bury the bodies once more so that they could be exhumed in the presence of observers, many of whom were neutral. Further on, the Soviet communiqué claims that these 500 Russians had themselves been shot in order to destroy all evidence of the perfidious machination. Where were these 500 shot by the Germans? The Soviet communiqué does not say. Where were they buried? That remains a mystery. In spite of its obvious value to support their own version, the Soviet authorities, on their own territory and possessing an excellent intelligence service, cannot find out where these 500 Soviet soldiers were buried. That alone is enough to suspect that the story is an invention.

The communiqué quotes the evidence of numerous witnesses who claim that 500 prisoners had been taken from Camp No. 126, but none of these witnesses give either the reason for their departure nor any hint of what happened later to these 500 unfortunates. Even if we agree that there were such prisoners taken from such a camp, where is the proof that they were used to dig up the bodies of the Katyn victims?

## 13. MOSKOVSKAYA—THE ONLY WITNESS

This important circumstance—the only proof which is to convince the world of the innocence of the Soviet

Government—rests on the evidence of only one witness, a certain Moskovskaya. The communiqué states :

The testimony of Moskovskaya made it clear where the 500 war prisoners from camp 126 were actually sent. On October 5th, 1943, the citizen Moskovskaya, Anna Mikailovna, who lived on the outskirts of Smolensk and had worked during the occupation in the kitchen of a German military unit, filed an application to the Extraordinary Committee for the Investigation of atrocities perpetrated by the German invaders, requesting them to summon her to give important evidence.

The Soviet communiqué does not give any further particulars about this witness, does not mention her exact address, being satisfied with the “outskirts of Smolensk.” This witness, who, if only she could convince us, would be the only one to really shake the evidence incriminating the Soviet side, is treated with a suspicious brevity. What has she to say ?

#### 14. EVIDENCE GIVEN IN MARCH OF THE EVENTS OF APRIL

She can only repeat to us what she had been told by a certain Yegorov who afterwards vanished without any trace. This part of the communiqué deserves special attention.

She told the Special Commission that before leaving for work in March, 1943, when she went to fetch firewood from the shed in the yard on the banks of the Dniepr, she discovered there an unknown person who proved to be a Russian war prisoner.

Further on she related :

From conversation with him, I learned that his name was Nikolai Yegorov, a native of Leningrad. Since the end of 1941 he had been in the German camp No. 126 for war prisoners in the town of Smolensk. At the beginning of March, 1943, he was sent with a column of several hundred war prisoners from the camp to the Katyn Forest. There they, including Yegorov, were compelled to dig up graves containing bodies in the uniforms of Polish officers, drag these bodies out of the graves and take out of their pockets documents, letters, photographs and all other articles . . .

Articles, documents and letters extracted from the clothing of the bodies were examined by the German officers who then compelled them to put part of the papers back in the pockets of the bodies, while the rest was flung on a heap of articles and documents they had extracted and later burned.

Besides this, the Germans made the prisoners put into the pockets of the Polish officers some papers which they took from the cases or suitcases (I don't remember exactly) which they had brought along. All the war prisoners lived in the Katyn Forest in dreadful conditions under the open sky, and were extremely strongly guarded . . . At the beginning of April, 1943, all the work planned by the Germans was apparently completed, as for three days not one of the war prisoners had to do any work . . .

Suddenly at night, all of them without exception were awakened and led somewhere. The guard was strengthened. Yegorov sensed that something was wrong and began to watch very closely everything that was happening. They marched for three hours in an unknown direction. They stopped in the forest at a pit in a clearing. He saw how a group of war prisoners were separated from the rest, driven towards the pit and shot. The war prisoners grew

agitated, restless and noisy. Not far from Yegorov, several war prisoners attacked their guards. Other guards ran towards the place. Yegorov took advantage of the confusion and ran away into the dark forest, hearing shots and firing . . .

Moskovskaya ends her story by saying that when, on the following evening, she returned home she was told that Yegorov had, in the meantime, been arrested by the Germans.

This part of the communiqué is especially interesting in view of the dates quoted. On page 21 of the report published by the Russians we read: "She (Moskovskaya) said that in March, 1943, she found an unknown man . . . etc." and on p. 22 when she is repeating Yegorov's words, Moskovskaya continues: "At the beginning of April, 1943, all work, etc . . ."

A comparison of the two sentences shows that Yegorov told Moskovskaya in March, 1943, what happened to him in the *April* of the same year!

It should be noticed that the Soviet Commission's statement of the Germans changing the papers in the pockets of the corpses rests solely on Yegorov's words to Moskovskaya.

#### 15. COULD THE DOCUMENTS REALLY BE FALSIFIED?

Even if we admit that the Germans had actually dug up their victims to remove from their pockets all papers bearing a later date than April, 1940, so as to be able to show the bodies to the various delegations who visited Katyn, surely such an operation would have left some trace on the bodies and their clothing? Having personally seen these bodies, I and many other witnesses, several of them experts, are satisfied that no such traces were discernible.

We next come to the question of the newspapers of which the murdered men had so many. The existence of these papers and the way in which they had been used by the victims render the Soviet accusations of the Germans having brought them there in suitcases entirely worthless. How could they ever be put in the jack-boots of the corpses? I have explained the impossibility of the falsification of these documents in Chapter XIII. I do not think I can add any more.

But there are others who can. The evidence of eye-witnesses—who are at present at liberty and ready to bear testimony—confirms my view of the utter physical impossibility of making a thorough examination of 11,000 (or even of 4,500) bodies which had remained in the graves for several years and which were completely rotted together, to unbutton and button again their pockets, to take out the documents, read them through, and put some of them back again with the newly brought papers—and all this in March when the ground is frozen hard and covered by snow . . .

But even if, in spite of common sense which points to the contrary, such a thing was theoretically possible, it would have left signs so plainly visible that how could the German Government have risked bringing observers from abroad, and Polish representatives, and actually invite a delegation from the International Red Cross, to view the bodies? It would risk the whole of their propaganda and cause an appalling scandal.

The analysis of the Soviet communiqué, if anything, weakens the Soviet version by exposing to light crudely fabricated lies, which might have been avoided if the Soviet Government had never set up this Commission. What is to be wondered at, is the naïveté with which this collection of excuses has been presented to the world. Not only does it incriminate the Russians but it shows their ignorance of what justice really means in civilized countries.

## 16. WHY MARCH AND APRIL 1940 AND NOT JUNE 1941 ?

As a logical conclusion to the case :

At the time of the withdrawal of the Red Army into the interior of Russia before the German drive, the Soviet authorities took care to evacuate all civilian and war prisoners without exception ; those who could not be taken were murdered (see Chapter VI). All the evidence as to this is at variance with the Soviet statement alleging the abandonment of Polish prisoners in the vicinity of Smolensk. This leads to yet another question.

If the Germans had really committed the crime, why did they not announce that the Polish prisoners were murdered in June, 1941, instead of accusing the Bolsheviks of doing it in March-April, 1940? They must have known how the Soviet authorities dealt with their prisoners, and could have taken advantage of it. If the Germans had had the intention of persuading the world of their innocence, such a version would have been far more credible. It would have done away with all contradictions and evidence drawn from the supposed existence of the prisoners for over a year and a half after the date given by the Germans as the time of the murder. Lastly, having brought the date as close as possible to that maintained by the Russians, the Germans would have avoided all possible medical or legal controversy as to the state of the bodies, etc.

Such things would have been so important to the Germans had they really been guilty that, once having decided to pass the blame on to the Russians, surely they would have chosen to announce the summer of 1941 instead of the spring of 1940 as the time of the murder ?

Having had every opportunity to do this, and yet choosing March-April, 1940, as the date of the crime they would have shown carelessness hard to explain had they really committed the Katyn massacre. It is

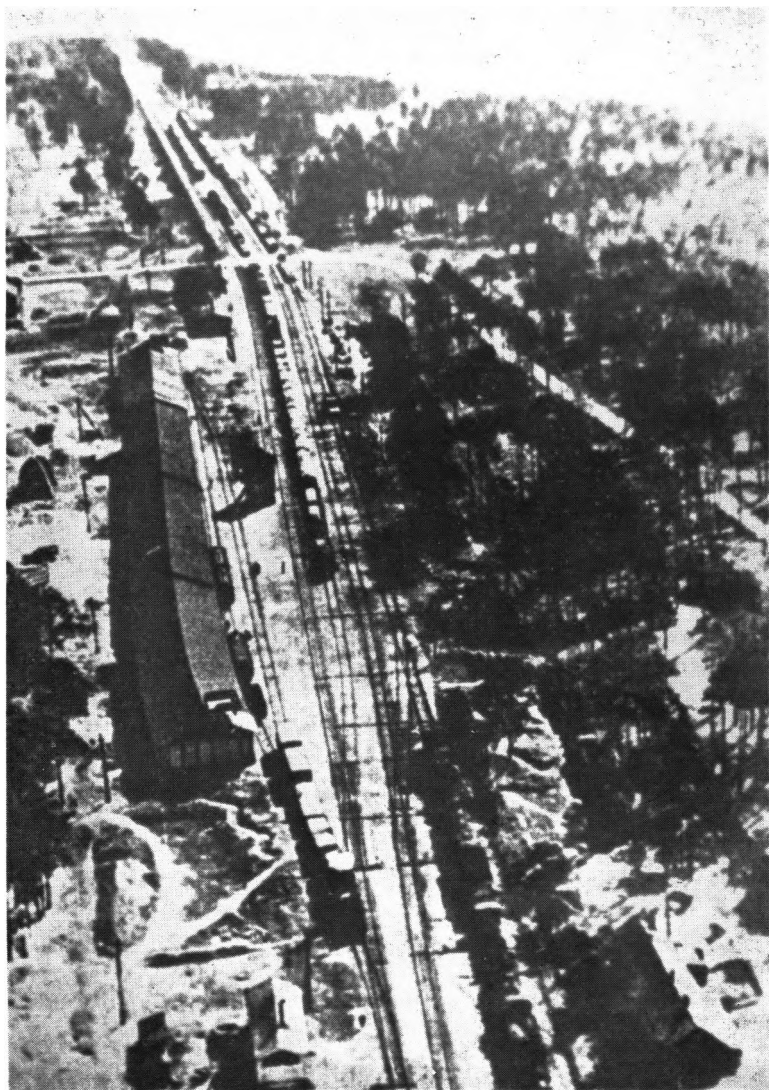


difficult to believe that the Gestapo, after having specialised in mass murder, would have made such a mistake.

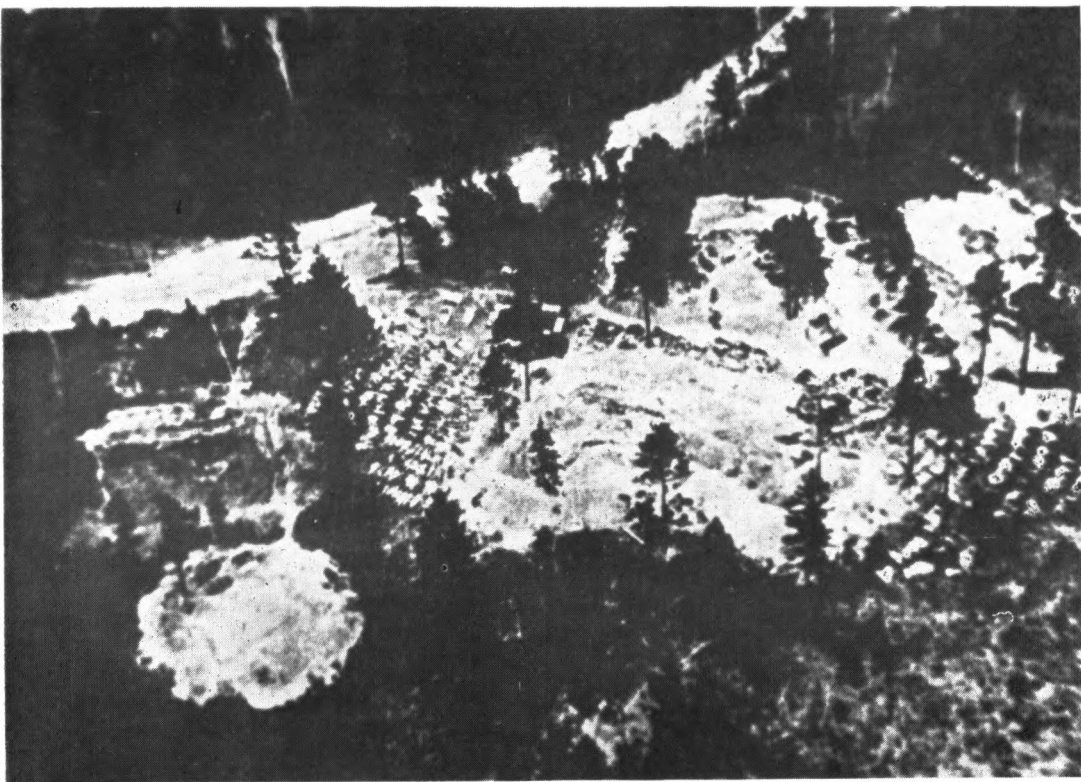
But for once, with the Katyn crime, the Germans did not need to conceal any clues. They were not guilty and they were only too anxious that the world should know the truth. It is a strange paradox and a very sad conclusion that this truth is still unbelieved or wholly unknown. Furthermore such ignorance contains a danger for the future. Because if the culprit of such a crime is not brought to the dock—what will his next crime be? Or should we not rather ask—who will be his next victim?



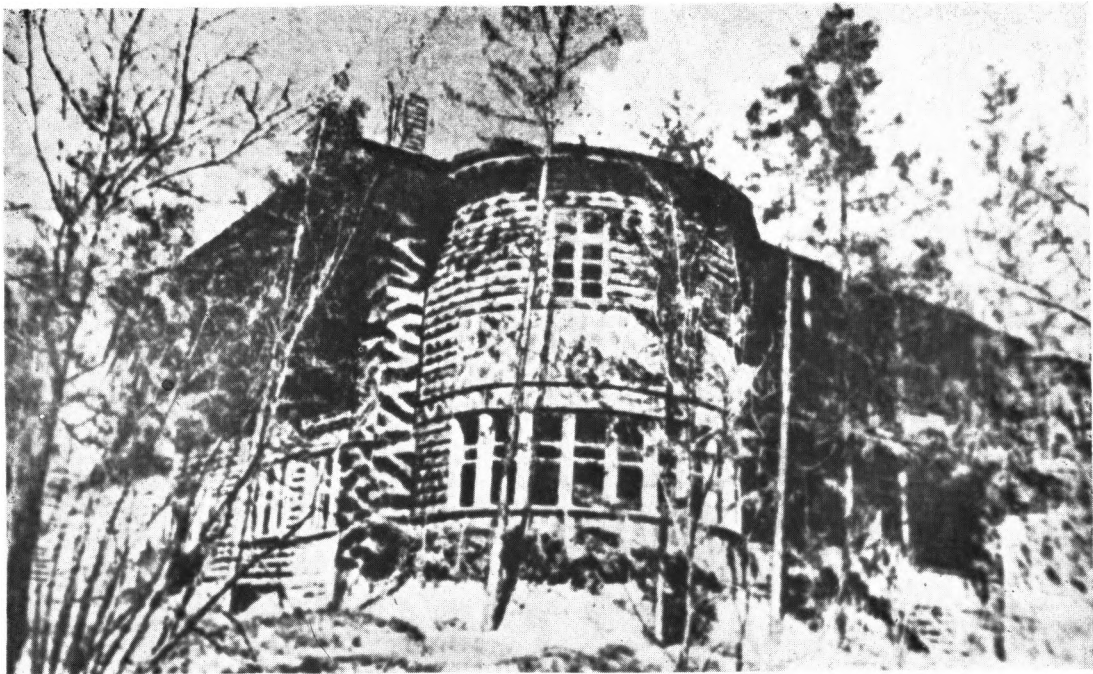
The part of the Katyn Wood called *Kosogory* ("Goat Hills") where the massacre was committed is beautifully situated over the river Dnieper. Left, among the trees on the hill, a glimpse of the summer rest-house of the NKVD personnel.



The railway station at Gniezdovo near Smolensk to which were sent the Polish officers from the Kozielsk camp in Spring, 1940. To the right, the ribbon of the main road leading from Smolensk is visible. Further up it crosses the railway track, heading towards the Katyn Wood.



A general view of the grave-field (a German photograph taken from air), after the exhumation works had already started. Around the dug-up graves, rows of corpses awaiting identification. Top left, the sandy road which leads from the Smolensk highway to the summer rest-house of NKVD functionaries, the so-called "Datcha."



The famous "Datcha" or villa. A summer rest-place for NKVD functionaries in the Katyn Wood. According to some of the versions it was here that the victims were searched for the last time before being murdered.

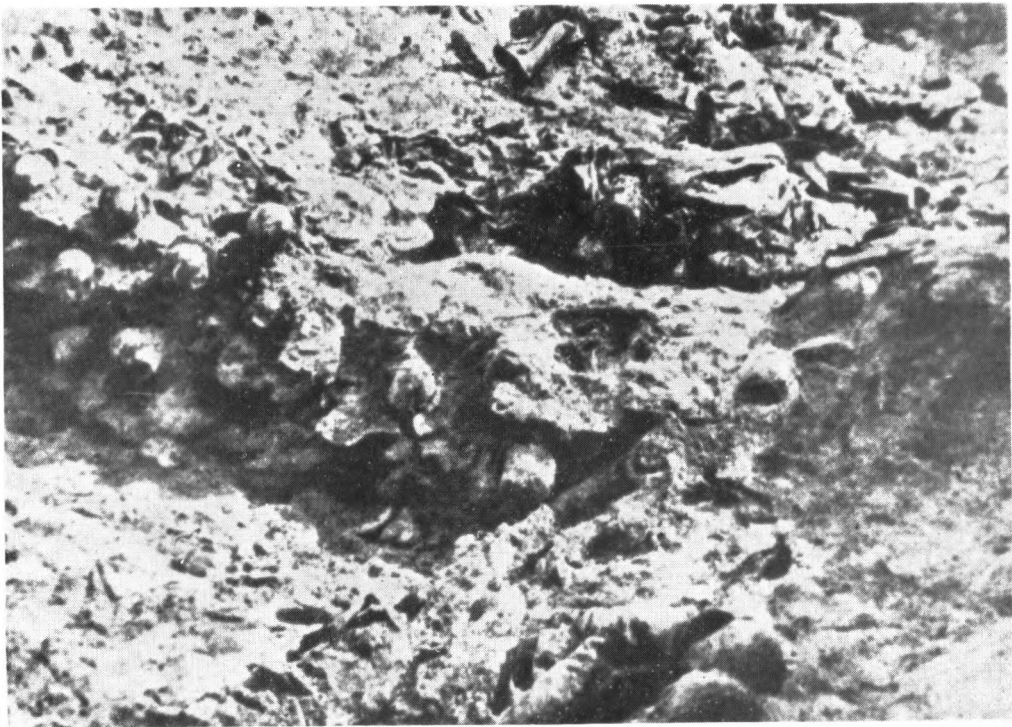


The digging up of the largest mass-grave, the one which, because of its characteristic shape, was named the "L" grave.



The corpse of a major of the Polish Army. After the armlets have been cleaned the distinctions of the officer's rank are clearly visible.





The International Commission ascertained that the bodies in the graves formed a tightly-pressed mass, partly deformed by pressure and clotted together by putrefaction. This proved that they could never have been moved since they were thrown into the graves.





A Delegation of the Polish Red Cross in Katyn, in the middle of April, 1943.



At the inspection :—The author of this book (in the middle) examining newspapers and documents retrieved from the pockets of the victims. Beside him, Dr. Wodzinski (with a Red Cross band) ; left and right, delegates of the Polish workers ; in the second row (in spectacles), a Swedish correspondent.



The International Experts Commission at work in the Katyn Wood. The post-mortem examination of the bodies.



Prof. Orsos, professor of Forensic Medicine in Budapest University, was one of the Commission's members who spoke Russian. We see him talking to Partemon Kisilev.



On the body of General Mieczysław Smorawinski were found :—  
 A Post Office Savings Book, a Certificate entitling him to wear the  
 “Virtuti Militari” Cross, an Identity Card, a cigarette case, a golden  
 ring and two medallions — the photograph shows the certificate of  
 the Order of the “Virtuti Militari” Cross.

**DOWÓDZTWO  
KORPUSU OCHRONY POGRANICZA**  
(formacja K. O. P.)

Nr. 1637

St. kapelan

**Ksiądz ZIOŁKOWSKI Jan I.**

na podstawie rozkazu Nr. 44/32 jest upraw-  
niony (a) do noszenia odznaki Korpusu Ochrony  
Pogranicza.

M. P. WARSZAWA

data 11 listopada 1932  
SZEF SZTABU

Pieczęć  
okrągle

(podpis)  
Huszczyński  
ppłk. dypl.

Retrieved from the pockets of the murdered Chaplain, the Rev. Jan Ziolkowski, were:—a visiting card, a certificate entitling him to wear the Frontier Defence Corps Medal, two prayer books, two photographs, a wooden cigarette case, a Rosary and two little chains. The photograph shows the Certificate of the Frontier Defence Corps.



Typical contents of one of the victims' pockets :— Identity plate, a postcard, Polish banknotes, leather tobacco pouch, a purse, a stump of a green pencil, scraps of a newspaper, a box of Soviet matches, a comb, etc.

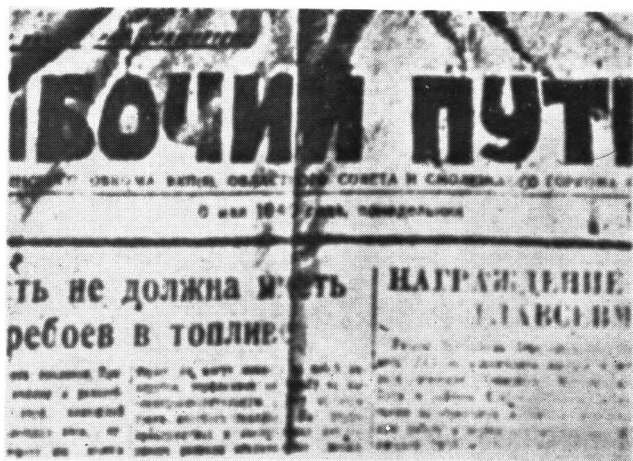


After having been cleaned : Polish armlets, 400-Zloty banknotes, medals, chains, coins, crosses and military medals. All objects easily recognisable. The lettering on the banknotes legible.

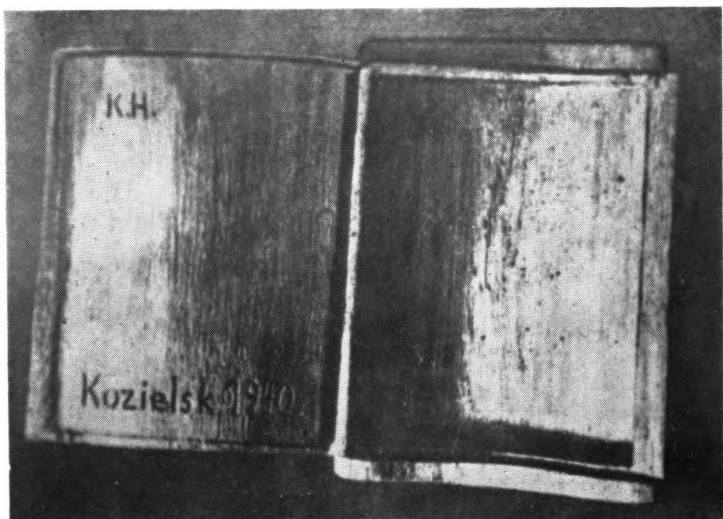




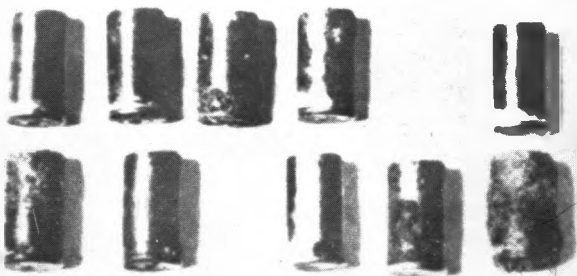
One of the 1640 postcards found in the pockets of the murdered, in its typical condition after taking it out of the grave. The postcard is from German-occupied Poland, sent by Bronislaw Zielnicka to her husband in Kozielec. The photograph enables even the date on the Moscow stamp to be read:—8.2.40.



Copy of a Soviet newspaper—*Roboczij Put*—dated 6th May, 1940, retrieved from mass-grave No. 8.



Examples of objects carved in wood by Polish prisoners-of-war with the name "Kozielsk" clearly legible. The wooden cigarette case marked with the initials "K.H." has also the date "1940" after the name of the camp.



*Two top rows :—* Bullets found among the bodies or retrieved from the skulls. Some of them show the characteristic deformations. One whole pistol cartridge found in one of the graves.

*Two bottom rows :—* Cartridge cases found in great quantities in graves and in the wood. All are stamped with the sign : "Geco 7,65 D."



British, South African and American prisoner-of-war officers, brought by the Germans to Katyn, watch the results of a post-mortem carried out on one of the bodies.



Rev. Stanislas Jasinski, the Canon of Cracow delegated by the Archbishop of Cracow, praying for the victims on a little mound surrounded by rows of bodies dug out of the Katyn graves.